

Two-time Hugo Award Nominee

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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The Bob Dylan Solution
By Walter Jon Williams

And Stories by:
LARRY NIVEN
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R. DAVID LUDWIG
BILL JOHNSON

**PREMIERE
NEWSSTAND
ISSUE**

*Will the Real Alien
Please Stand Up?*
By Robert A. Metzger



Belief Systems

By Patricia Anthony
Art by David Deitrick

I hear the kids sometimes. They're the worst. But when I run to the cargo bay to look at them, they've climbed back in their little coffins and put that mummy stuff around their faces. I can even see ice crystals in the wrappings. Clever.

I tell Mike.

"What do they say to you, Danny?" he asks.

I watch him. "They don't say anything to me. They're ghosts. They talk to each other."

"Those children are in cryogenic suspension. You know that," he tells me. He also says, "Besides, there are no such things as ghosts."

Sometimes I slip up and say stuff like that to Mike. I forget that androids have no imagination.

"You're an android," I tell him.

He looks surprised. "Why in hell do you think that?"

"I killed somebody to get here. What'd you do?"

Mike looks away. When he's trying to be evasive he does that. It's so I can't look into his eyes. They don't do eyes very well. "I don't think that's pertinent."

"It's pertinent if you're here. My ticket was murder. I sliced somebody. I forget now just why. Maybe I was going to rob them. It's been a long time."

I look out the window into space. Stars that I don't know look back. I never thought much about the stars until I was sent here. I still don't think much of them.

"How long has it been?" I ask.

"I don't know."

"If you're an android you know."

"Maybe I'm not an android. Maybe you are."

I think about that, of course. Then I go into the kitchen and cut my arm with a knife. Red stuff comes out. It looks like blood.

Mike doesn't sleep much. Sometimes he lies down in his bunk and pretends, but he never shuts himself off. Mike doesn't bother me, though. It's the kids that keep me awake.

"Maybe I'm going crazy."

"Maybe so," Mike says.

"You bastard. You'd like me to think that, wouldn't you?"

Mike pretends to ignore me.

"I want to go home."

Mike was pretending to read. He was pretending to be annoyed that I was interrupting him.

"Take me home. I'll be good. I promise."

He puts down the book. "You should have thought about that before you made the deal with the judge. Now it's too late. We're almost thirty light years from

Earth. There's nothing anyone can do."

"I can kill the kids," I tell him.

He picks up the book again. "I know you too well. You wouldn't do that."

"Maybe you don't know me as well as you think. I killed once, didn't I?"

"I read your report. Sounded like a case of self-defense and a bad lawyer to me."

"Are you my guard or my jail-mate?" I ask him.

He doesn't look up. He doesn't answer, either.

"Anyway, I'd like to see if the kids are ghosts or not. If I can kill them, then I guess they were real."

Finally Mike seems mad. He puts down the book and stares at me for a long time. "Then I'd have to kill you."

Androids take their jobs very seriously. They also have no sense of humor.

I go to my cabin and turn on the Tactile. The bar is smoky the way it always is. The woman sitting on a stool is a blonde this time, but she looks the same: too much makeup, too little dress. Her top is cut to the navel, exposing a pair of cantaloupe breasts. Her skirt drags on the floor.

Bending forward, I bring my lips right next to hers. She smells like sweat and perfume. "I'm a leg man," I tell her. "Can't they ever get that straight? I'm a leg man. Who do I have to complain to around here?"

It was fun the first time I did that. Then I found out they don't react.

"Buy me a drink," she says in a throaty voice.

The bourbon makes my eyes water. The smoke in the room makes me squint. Off to the right I catch the sweet tang of marijuana.

"My place or yours?" the blonde asks as she rubs a hot hand up the back of my neck.

I reach over to kiss her. Her mouth is soft as ripe fruit and she tastes of liquor and stale cigarettes. She disappears when I turn the Tactile off. I walk to the lounge.

"Don't they have any better programs?" I ask.

Mike shrugs. "They have a whole library. You've been through them all."

"You never use them."

"I don't get my pleasure that way."

"What kind of pleasure do androids have?" I ask him.

He shakes his head wearily. "I'm a pretty good programmer. Maybe I can make you up one. What sort of thing would you like?"

(Continued to page 6)



Contents

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Short Stories

Belief Systems.....Page 2
By Patricia Anthony
Art by David Deitrick

A Matter of Thirst.....Page 11
By Bill Johnson
Art by Bob Eggleton

The Bob Dylan Solution.....Page 26
By Walter Jon Williams
Art by Pat Morrissey

The Portrait of Daryanree the King.....Page 34
By Larry Niven
Art by Pat Morrissey

Sing a Song of Porkchops.....Page 43
By Thomas A. Easton
Art by Larry Blamire

Made for Each Other.....Page 62
By R. David Ludwig
Art by Robert Pasternak

Poetry
Moon.....Page 41
By John B. Rosenman

Departments

Cover Art for A Matter of Thirst.....Page 1
By Bob Eggleton

Editor's Notes.....Page 9
By Charles C. Ryan

Our Renewal Policy.....Page 17
Books.....Page 18

By Darrell Schweitzer
Our Alien Publisher.....Page 23

By a crazy alien
What If? — Science.....Page 24

By Robert A. Metzger
Boomerangs.....Page 32

Cartoon.....Page 37
By Jerry Workman

Through the Lens.....Page 40
By Susan Ellison

From the Bookshelf.....Page 49
By Janice M. Eisen

Aborigines.....Page 54
By Laurel Lucas

Advertisements

Interzone.....Page 5
The Aboriginal SF Anthology.....Page 15

Missing 4 & 5?.....Page 22
Aboriginal Science Fiction.....Page 29

Back Issues.....Page 45
A Long Time Ago.....Page 47

Classifieds.....Page 61
The Art Gallery.....Page 68

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Belief Systems *(Continued from page 2)*

"I'm tired of whores," I tell him. "A nice girl would be good."

Mike seems offended.

I stare down at his foot. It's bare. The toenails are great. Very realistic. I've never seen Mike cut them. He has a brush in his room and there are blond hairs in it. They're always the same hairs.

"I'd like to meet a nice girl," I tell him. "We get married, raise a family. In this life, in this pretend life, I go into business. Something dull like insurance maybe. Maybe marketing. I've got a son who goes to Princeton and a daughter who marries a doctor. We move to the country into a house with a white picket fence. We've got a dog and three horses. Mary, my wife, loves the horses. She's not much of a country-club type, though. She stays home, takes care of the house, and cooks me dinner. I come home from the office for lunch: hot soup and a sandwich. Think you can make something like that?"

"Maybe," he says, and his voice is real quiet.

I get up from the chair and go to the back so he can't see I'm shaking.

Mike follows me, anyway.

"I'm scared," I say.

"Of what?"

"I'm scared because nothing's real. Time's not real. I'm scared when I go to sleep because I sleep for a long time. They put a gas into the cubicle and I sleep for years. Then they wake me up so I think I'm living."

"Who'd do that to you?"

I glance at him. "You would."

Mike doesn't say anything, but his eyes look strange, the way android eyes look.

"The only thing I can't figure out is why you don't let me sleep. Forever?"

"Maybe I'd get lonely."

I laugh. "You can't get lonely. You're an android."

For a minute Mike looks hurt. Then he lifts his eyebrows just like he was surprised again. "Oh, yeah. That's right. I'm an android. I keep forgetting about that."

"Maybe it has something to do with my sentence. Maybe I'm supposed to be awake."

"Probably. Do they let lifers sleep their way through prison?"

I don't answer. There are small blank spots in my memory, and the blank spots move: bubbles in carbonated water. "You put me to sleep sometimes because you're afraid I'll go crazier."

Mike shrugs and starts to walk away. "Whatever you want to think, Danny."

I stop him by grabbing his arm. He looks around like he's afraid or angry or something. "Where are we going?" I ask him.

"A nice place. They promised us that. We spend our prison term in space, and when we get the kids to the new planet we're free. They promised us that. Don't you remember?"

"But why are we here? And who are those kids?"

"They're going to colonate ..."

PAGE 6

ing his mistake. A strange mistake for an android. Maybe something's wrong with his program. He laughs. His eyes don't. "... I mean colonize ..."

"I liked it better the other way. Colonate. They're going to colonate a new planet. Me, they're going to murderize."

They're going to murderize me. I can feel it. The kids talk about it among themselves.

"Why do you put me to sleep, Mike? It scares me. Don't put me to sleep."

He smiles sadly. His mouth is done good. After I eat I go to my cabin. Mike puts me to sleep for three years.

"How long has it been?" I ask him.

"I don't know."

"Time goes fast."

"Time's dilated with the speed we're traveling."

"You know what bothers me?" I ask.

"What?"

"I've been wondering why I'm here."

He looks interested.

"They have you. You're an android. You're immortal, as much as anything can be. You take care of the ship. I don't do anything. They really don't need me. I'm a murderer, after all. And I'm slowly going crazy. I can't be around the kids when they get to that new place."

It looks like he's trying very hard to follow my train of thought. "So you tell me. What do you think you're doing here?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm scared."

"I think you're already crazy," he says.

When I go to my cabin Mike puts me to sleep for another three years.

I wake up screaming.

It's the first time I've ever seen Mike upset. He comes over and puts his hand on my shoulder. He has a strong hand, a hand that should belong to a father who'd forgive you anything or a big brother who'd protect you from danger. "Don't, Danny. It's all right."

"I'm so scared. Oh, Christ. I'm so scared."

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of being alone. I can't stand the thought of being alone."

"I'm here," he tells me.

I'm ashamed to cry because I cry ugly. Not like some people I used to know. When I cry, I blubber. Mike puts his arms around me and holds me tight, my head right up against him. I can hear his heart pound easy and slow in his chest. His body is warm. On the index finger of his right hand is a tiny white scar, no wider than a hair.

I tell him, "Sometimes I think something will happen to you, like your program will fail or something, and I'll be here all by myself. Me and the ghosts of those kids. Can you die?"

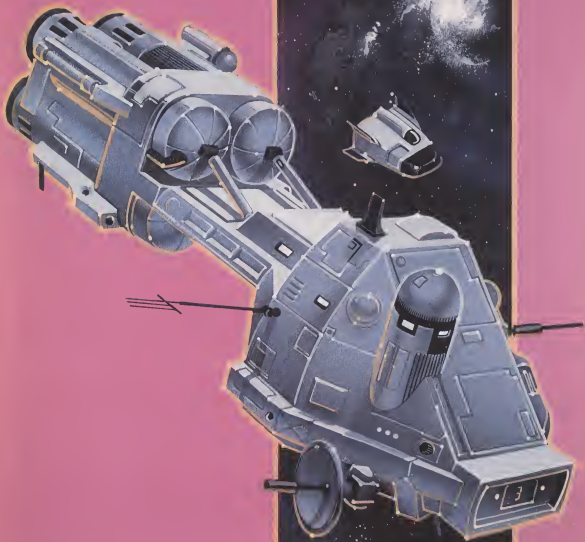
"Everyone dies. Everyone."

"Just don't leave me."

His warm breath lifts the hair on my forehead. "No, Danny. I won't leave you. Don't be afraid."

He holds me for a long time, not saying anything else. When he takes me to my cabin to rest, I sleep for four years.

Sept./Oct. 1989



When I wake up we're there.

"That blue planet. It wasn't there when I went to bed."

"We travel fast," Mike says.

"How long has it been?"

Mike stares at me with his empty, android eyes.

"Thirty-nine years," he tells me.

Before we go down, I wander into the bathroom and study myself in the mirror. I can't remember too well, but it seems like I haven't aged. I don't know if Mike is lying about how long it took, or if, when he puts me to sleep, he freezes me, too. I'd never know. I'll never know.

He gets me into the landing vehicle. He knows how to fly it. They never taught me anything except how to work the Tactile and where to find the programs. After we land, I wait a long time before Mike opens the door.

"What are we waiting for?"

He looks up from his instruments. "I'm checking the air. We don't want to walk outside and get poisoned."

"Right. How long has it been?"

"Couple of hours. I had to make sure of the particulate count, fungus, pollen, that sort of thing. I had to take soil samples with the corer and check for bacteria. So," he says somberly. Mike's always somber. "You ready, or what?"

"Yeah. I guess."

He opens the door. Bright, friendly light flows into the airlock like a promise. I take a deep breath of the breeze and smell rain.

We walk outside. It's not Earth, but something like it. Trees bearing purple pear-shaped fruit tower over my head. I stroll a few feet. The moss under my feet is spongy. The air is cool and damp. To my right is a stream with neon-pink fish in its depths.

"Pretty?" Mike asks.

I take in a long breath, watching the pattern the sun makes as it lances through the strange leaves. It has been so long that my voice isn't quite steady. "Please tell me. Is it real?"

"Yes," Mike says from behind me. "It's real. But is it pleasant?"

I start to ask if he doesn't see that for himself, but then I remember he can't. It's not his fault. Androids can tell safe, but they can't tell beautiful.

We'd been together a long time, Mike and me. He'd made me feel fear. At times he'd made me feel hatred. This was the first time I felt sorry for him.

On a broad oval leaf next to me cool globes of dew shimmer. "Yes," I say as tears gather in my eyes and roll, sweet and hot, down my cheek. "Oh, God. Yes."

"Danny?"

I turn and see the pulse pistol in his hands. He's pointing it at the center of my chest.

"Thank you for telling me," he says.

The world explodes into color. The targeting field makes rainbow auras around things. I hear the excited beep-beep-beep as the lock-on of the pistol finds me.

Then the beep-beep and the colors go away. I can breathe again. Mike's hand is jerking up and down. His eyes roll up into his head. There is something very

wrong with his program.

I hear the SHOMP sound as the pistol fires and the PLINK as the laser hits a boulder not a foot away from my side.

Mike stops shaking. I'm looking right at his face. His voice and mouth are sad. His eyes are empty. "I'm sorry," he says. He's not looking at me.

Then he turns and makes his way back into the carrier. He's not moving very well. I cross the stream and hide in some bushes. In a few minutes he lowers the back of the carrier and rides out on a digger.

He has to stop every few minutes because he can't plow a straight line. Finally he manages to dig a hole. He makes it deep. When he's finished, he comes back and picks up the boulder. It is a big boulder, and must be very heavy, but he carries it gently. He lays it in the hole and stands over the hole for a long time.

He's started to shake again. I want to go over and say something to him, but I'm afraid. In a little while he fills in the dirt, gets back in the carrier and lifts off. I think I won't ever see him again.

The next morning the carrier wakes me up. Mike lands and leads out the kids. They pile out of the ship and stand around him. Mike is walking a lot better now, and the kids are doing kid things.

I'm hungry. Towards noon I can't stand it any more, and I stand up in the bushes where I'm hiding. Some of the kids look over, but Mike doesn't notice.

"Hi, Mike," I say, wondering if he'll shoot me. He still has the pulse pistol in his belt.

Mike is solid; the only solid thing here. He's so real that it makes my chest hurt. If he'd look around at me I'd touch him. Maybe I'd cry. "Mike?" I call. He is fiddling with the aircrate machine, and even though it's making noise, he should have heard me. He doesn't turn around.

I walk up the ramp and go into the kitchen.

"Who are you, Mister?" a little girl asks me. She comes up to about my waist.

I'm stuffing food in my mouth and putting freeze-dry envelopes in my pockets. I look down at her. She's blonde and small like some white kind of spider.

"Who are you?" she asks again, but I don't answer. She is too pale to be real.

I walk out of the ship and back to my hiding place. Mike doesn't turn to see me go.

Mike does real good with the kids. In the afternoon he makes them nap. When evening falls he builds a fire. He tells them stories about Cinderella and the tortoise and the hare. Then he tells the kids how their parents, who wouldn't have survived freezing, loved them so much they sent them away.

And when the kids at the edge of the circle are falling asleep, he explains how he was put in charge. He tells them how much he loves them.

When they're all asleep, he goes around, picks them up, and carries them into the cabins he's made. Then he goes outside and stands guard for a little while. When everything is quiet, he walks over to where he buried the rock. He sits there for a long while. He sits there so long that I get tired of watching

(Continued to page 57)



The Ultimate Guppy

Once we were frontiersmen, explorers of a great continent. Then we were clever, known worldwide for our American ingenuity. We put men on the moon and were the leaders in nearly every field of endeavor.

Now we're in danger of being eaten by the ultimate guppy.

You know what guppies are — they're those aquarium fish that eat anything smaller than they are, including their own young. Without intervention, this keeps on until there is only one guppy left in the tank — the ultimate guppy.

We read of hostile takeovers in the newspapers, of leveraged buyouts, of mergers — one of the guppiest and scariest being the proposed Time-Warner merger.

Why scary?

Time-Warner. Movies, television, books, magazines. The merger, Time-Warner officials say, will give them clout in an increasingly competitive world marketplace. And that's true.

But it also means it will be that much more difficult for anyone else to market competing movies, television shows, magazines, or books.

As I write this, Paramount has announced an attempt to buy enough Time Inc. stock so it can thwart Warner and become the ultimate guppy. And so it goes.

Every year fewer and fewer people control more and more of what we read, see, hear, and think.

Yes — think.

The human brain is a marvelous organic instrument, a creative computer nearly without par. But

no computer, silicon or organic, is any better than the raw data entered into its memory banks.

And the number of people who select the data that's available for input is shrinking.

Here's a minor example. *Time* magazine regularly runs multi-page, glowing reviews about new movies. But on several of those occasions, *Time* failed to mention that it owned a piece of the action — that it stood to profit if the movie did well.

Newsweek mentioned it. But how long before *Newsweek*, which is already owned by the *Washington Post*, is merged into something else? Before it is eaten by the ultimate guppy? And if *Time* does it with movies, what else might be slanted?

Coverage of the next presidential election, the next arms treaty, the next scientific breakthrough?

When Time-Warner wants to make a film, will it buy the rights to one of its own books and keep the proceeds in-house? Or will it look at all the books being published? And how many books won't be published because Time-Warner decides they wouldn't appeal to a big enough audience to be profitable?

An executive at one of these corporations recently told me it costs \$5,000 just to turn its computer on. Aside from indicating it has the wrong kind of computer, it gives you an idea of corporate thinking. If it isn't big, it isn't worth talking about. Which means that small press could easily become non-existent press. Of

equal concern is the real possibility that such massive corporations will so dominate marketing that there will be no room for smaller competitors to be displayed.

There is already fierce competition among book and magazine publishers for the relatively few display spaces available in bookstores and newsstands. Would a presence as large as Time-Warner, or Paramount-Time, have the power to hog those spaces, to muscle competitors out altogether?

Who will play referee?

There are a number of other problems with guppy corporations.

The first and foremost is that the bigger a corporation is, the less likely it is to take any risks and the more likely it is to be run by its accountants.

A corollary to this is that it becomes less and less likely that bigger publishers will waste time with new writers or artists.

It is rare that a first novel breaks even. And if accountants have the say, as they do more and more often in the corporate world, this means the market for first novels could evaporate.

The next big problem with big corporations is that no one can make a decision. Everything is done by committee. Big corporations are actually more bureaucratic than governments, as absurd and crazy as that seems. For example, look how sluggish Exxon was to respond to the Alaskan oil spill.

(Continued to page 22)



A Matter of Thirst

By Bill Johnson

Art by Bob Eggleton

A cramp moved up Antony's thigh to his crotch and back again. His leg trembled and he thought he might pitch sideways. He moved slowly, carefully, so he could stretch without pulling the suit's life support hoses into sunlight. The cramp started up his leg. He gripped a girder, pushed, and swung himself upside down.

Nausea. He closed his eyes, then carefully opened them. Everything was skewed crazily, and he hung feet first over nothing. He closed his eyes. He opened them.

The bleeder valve was up! Earth was sideways; the Moon was down. His world spun, fixed, and everything was right again. An old trick for weightlessness, but it worked. And his leg felt better. He reached for his toolbox and went back to work.

The electric welder worked well now, ever since maintenance had fixed up a good lathe. He worked swiftly: patch on, weld it, patch on, weld it. The holes in the tank weren't large, gravel size or smaller, but they threw off the tank's equilibrium and wasted water.

Antony turned off his radio and hummed while he worked. He used to sing but his section manager had told him it bothered the rest of the crew.

He was twenty-four years old and still healthy. He wondered how long it would last. He thought a couple of moles on his neck had grown larger lately, but he didn't want to go to a doctor and find out for sure. The cancer got everybody eventually; sometimes it was better not to know and just keep working. He knew if the doctors found cancer they'd tell his section manager. The section manager would take him off outside work, put him in a classroom as an instructor. He'd last longer inside the cylinder, away from outside radiation, but he didn't want to stay inside the cylinder. He felt uncomfortable inside, as if the walls were about to close around him.

He finished the tank and pushed off. He landed on one of the tank's support struts. It was old, original equipment lifted from Earth. It was always exposed to direct sunlight and the protective paint had evaporated away long ago. On a normal maintenance schedule it was long overdue for replacement.

He felt that strut move, bend and break. Jagged metal cut his air hose. The suit sealed the hose, he went on reserve air and his emergency signal turned on his radio and began to yodel. The tank swung pon-

derously, pivoted on three legs, then two, then one, as other struts twisted loose. The tank struck him just below the sternum and snapped his tether line.

"Ay, Dios," he said softly. He wondered how the hell he was going to explain this.

The stars swung in giant cartwheels as he drifted from the cylinder. He screamed once, as he split the terminator line, the edge of the shadow that covered the cylinder, his face turned toward the Sun. The suit was old and polarization wasn't as fast as it had been, and he'd had his eyes very wide open, so he didn't see the water tank strike the cylinder, break the bleeder valve and spray thousands and thousands of glittering Christmas tree droplets into deep space.

Carol looked down the conference table and tried to remember the last time she'd seen a woman who wasn't pregnant or nursing. It had been a long time. Sometimes she thought of herself as a ghost, fluttering forever over one patch of ground, spiraling endlessly in interlocked circles.

She rubbed her forehead and looked down at her CRT screen. The computer had worked continuously, with only minor breakdowns, for over two years. Half its parts were cannibalized from old satellites, the other half home grown. It was a minor miracle it worked, but it spent most of its time on a list of what didn't work. She rubbed her eyes and worried.

the main solar cells are almost worn out, radiation damage, and output's down over five oh per cent compared to thirty years ago

if one damn strut broke, how many others are weak? We need to inspect, get a list, and put up warning signs until we get some metal and paint

some of the engines in the jump ships are erratic and we can't repair them, and without jump ships we can't reach the other cylinders and we need the other cylinders

give me some loam, Lord, and a little metal. She smiled at herself. And a lot of water and air and hydrogen and processor chips and a few factories and twice as many people with double the lifespan. Give me a specific for cancer. And Earth. And Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and...

She shook her head. They were young, but they were confident. Things always worked out for the best, someone always figured out how to fix things. They were young. By the time they got enough expe-

rience to start worrying, they were dead.

"The problem today is water," Carol said. The screens cleared to show water reserve tables, use projection curves, peak demand estimates, loss estimates, causes, and conservation plots. Carol didn't bother to look; she had always hated accounting classes and this was another, different, balance sheet.

"The accident today wiped out the emergency reserves of water. We've enough to complete the harvest, plant, and run the trade ships to the other cylinders for another year. At that point we drop below the sufficiency threshold."

The section managers didn't look up. Several of them typed in different data sets to try to alter the curves. One of them looked up and frowned. Carol tried to remember his name, couldn't. The names and faces changed too often.

"What about the other cylinders? Can we trade for water?"

She remembered. It rolled in her head like a print-out. Blair, James Blair, age 21, newly appointed section manager for external reclamation. The satellite retrieval people. She shook her head.

"None of the other cities has enough reserve water to make a difference, long term. Short term, yes, we think we can get enough to last maybe three years total. Long term, no. This has been coming at us for a long time, but other things seemed more urgent and we closed our eyes and hoped it would go away. The trouble is none of us has access to a source of water. We have the original supplies from Earth, and that's it. When we lose water, it's gone."

"What about Earth? There's water there."

Carol winced. Everything always came back to Earth. She thought about Earth in a Moebius strip, always back to point A no matter how far she went. The land of milk and honey and raw materials. A giant reminder crouched in the sky: water rich, metal rich, air rich, fertilizer rich. Every time there was a shortage someone mentioned Earth.

"It won't work. It'd take more reaction mass to get down than we could bring back. We'd lose water on the deal."

Blair leaned back in his chair and interlocked his fingers. He stretched, cracked his knuckles, and leaned forward. Everyone watched him.

"All right. What do you want to do?"

"First, we need to insure our short-term water supplies. We go on short rations, and try to trade for water."

"What if they don't want to trade? Or try to gouge us?"

"We'll pay a fair price, but I won't let us be gouged. I want you to get all your crews and ships ready for deep-space operations. Full rations, demolition equipment, medical supplies, everything."

"War?"

Carol shook her head. "No, I don't think so. Most of them will get as much profit as they can, but they'll share. They might need us sometime. The others will go along if they know we're ready to fight."

Blair smiled. The woman next to him leaned over and whispered in his ear. He smiled and put his hand up to quiet her.

"All right, sounds good to me. My crews and ships will be ready, just in case." The woman whispered in his ear. He frowned, tilted his head, and shook his hand in her face. "We still have the long-term problem. The longer we go without a source of water, the more it's going to cost and the more trouble we'll have. Eventually we're going to get to the point where we can't trade, or frighten anybody into trading, for it. Then we'll have to fight."

Carol gestured to the section head of astronomy. He doubled as a staff tech for the distillery and smelled like corn whiskey. There was sweat on the bridge of his nose. He seldom spoke in public and he was nervous. He spoke rapidly.

"We really don't have much choice. Earth would cost more than we'd get. The Moon and Venus are dry. Mars has water but the cost in time and water is too high. The only source is the Apollo asteroids. They're in our orbit, sixty degrees ahead and behind the Earth around the sun. There's enough water there to last for centuries. That's where we've got to go."

He sat and wiped his nose. None of the section managers moved. Carol waited. They had to convince themselves.

"How long?" Blair asked.

"Not more than a couple months, round trip," the astronomer said. "Accelerate there with a solar sail, and use the ice to fill your tanks and thrust back."

Blair shook his head impatiently. "No, no. The radiation on this trip, how much will you take?"

"I don't understand."

"How much sooner will they get cancer?"

Carol remembered his name. Smith. He didn't look uncomfortable with the question. She was glad Blair had asked it, instead of her.

"You'd lose, maybe, another two or three years. The shielding can't be very heavy if you're going to have a practical payload," Smith said.

Blair said, "Carol?"

"If all the cylinders share equally, and we have no more major losses, we'll last maybe three years before we start to fight over water. Fighting is expensive. Someone will win, short term; long term, we all die of thirst," Carol said.

"You'll be asking people to spend months locked in a metal coffin, slowly dying of radiation poisoning. If everything goes perfect, they get to come back here and die two, maybe three, maybe four years ahead of time," Blair said.

Carol leaned forward and said, "But do we have a choice? We have to have the water."

Blair popped his knuckles again. Slowly. Each one sounded very loud.

"Are you going to ask for volunteers?" he asked.

"No. I want no volunteers."

Blair looked tired. His section was the only one with deep-space docking and rendezvous experience, and he couldn't volunteer. He and Carol would have to select the crew.

There was no vote. Carol waited for more comments, heard a silent room, then turned off the CRT screens to save power. Everyone left and she lingered for a moment, puzzled by something she couldn't pinpoint. She saw that no one had touched any of the

water glasses. They were still full. She shrugged, turned off the lights, and shut the door.

She was alone and something was after her. It was dark, she couldn't see anything, but she knew it was out there. She was afraid to move, afraid to make noise. Her breathing sounded harsh and raspy and loud. It was closing on her, listening to her breathing, but she couldn't stop breathing and it was close, close, close....

Ramon moved restlessly in his sleep, his body curled around her, when she woke. Her sides were sweat slick, the bedcovers thrown on the floor. His arm rested on her hip.

The dream frightened her. The older she got, the more nightmares. Her doctor said the anti-cancer drugs made the nightmares worse. He was afraid to give her sleeping pills. She wondered how long she could last.

Night was the worst. Daytime was worktime, and she was busy with the cylinder. At night the recorders and aides went home and she was one more person on sleep shift.

She was forty-five years old, one and a half normal lifetimes, and an entire medical section kept her alive. She was first priority for anti-cancer drugs. The cylinder needed at least one person over thirty to handle long-range planning. Experience couldn't be taught.

Two radical mastectomies at twenty-six. Adrenalectomy at twenty-seven. Lost her spleen and other lymph glands at thirty and her ovaries at thirty-three. Hysterectomy at thirty-seven. Most of her skin was grafts, grown from a clear patch on her thigh, but the moles always returned. Most of her children were dead and she couldn't remember all her grandchildren's names. She thought of herself as a checked person, mottled in plaid.

Ramon moved again and Carol held him until he settled. He was twenty-six and already on the spinside slide. Sometimes he had nightmares and woke her. Carol hoped he lasted. She needed a lover, mostly for comfort, but she didn't have time to find her own. Her aides helped but she felt guilty that she couldn't even do that anymore without help.

She looked at the clock. Three hours left to the sleep period. She didn't dare take any more pain-killer; she was already at the maximum safe dosage.

Her mother had told her to say Hail, Marys when she was a child and couldn't sleep. She wasn't sure she remembered the prayer, but she tried and made up words to fill the gaps. She said the prayer over and over again and rocked slightly, her arm over Ramon's hip. She slept.

Blair's office was on the edge of the cylinder and had a porthole. Earth, three-quarters full, filled the lower half of the window. The solar cell farm, a molten field of fleur-de-lis mirrors, hung in a halo over the South Pole.

Blair said, "No volunteers? You're certain?"

"No volunteers. We can't afford it. We need to

pick the crew for best results, not to make ourselves feel better."

"I'd like to go."

The offer tempted her. Many section managers listened to Blair, and she didn't know what buttons to push to make him twitch. He was unpredictable and made her nervous. If he was gone he was predictable. If he returned he'd be a hero.

"No. I need you here. I don't have anyone else to do your job."

Blair didn't answer. Carol felt tired, irritable. She wanted to get it over, send them out, get the water back. The longer it took to get the ship out, the more nervous she got. Everything always took longer than planned. Her predecessor had explained that as the First Law of Management. She didn't want to know the crew, or even think of them as people. The cylinders were people. The water ship crew was an obstacle.

He played absently with the toys (a pen, an eraser, a dozen paper clips) on his desktop. An antique, a cube of clear plastic with a model of the solar system suspended on edge inside, stood to one side. He reached for it and touched it lightly.

"It's getting harder and harder to bring back the old satellites," he said. "We've picked up most of the ones in easy orbits. It'll be harder if you take my best men."

And what happens when they're all retrieved? "I'll adjust your quota. We'll just have to get by on less for a while."

He looked wistfully at the cube. She presumed he'd been a pilot; a radarman wouldn't have a faint permanent facial sunburn.

"I'm sorry," she said. He shrugged and pushed the cube away. He slid a list of names, ages, and job classes next to them, across the desk to her. They started down the list.

The ship was named *Lincoln/Lenin* (Soyuz/Pioneer XVI) and it was designed as the first manned Mars probe. The cancer plague shut down the project.

The cancers erupted suddenly, in a few months, in every person thirty years or older. Medical researchers at the Mayo Clinic found a human stomach bacterium, *E. coli*, now included a slow cancer virus. *E. coli* spread from mother to fetus, and on contact. No one was sure if the plague was an act of war, or an accident. Terrorists tried to claim credit, but their cures didn't work. Nations blamed each other, but no one would take the blame.

Lincoln/Lenin was abandoned while downstairs tried to cope. Downstairs failed. Within two years Earth was dark at night.

The cylinders ignored the ship and Earth and struggled with the new life expectancy. Only the cylinder repair crews saw *Lincoln/Lenin* occasionally, far above, as it flashed into sunlight over nighttime Earth. It was good luck to see the ship but, except for one quick-and-dirty salvage run, no one visited. The ship was too hard to reach for pleasure runs.

Blair brought the jumpship alongside, fired retros until the ships matched speeds. Earth loomed above

him and covered the sky, very blue, very cold. Two crew with jumppacks crossed the gap. They carried cables. Winches pulled the ships together.

Lincoln/Lenin was pocked and faded, the metal abraded as if lightly cuffed by a sandblaster. When the project was mothballed the sails were furled onto their masts. The masts formed a giant cross, the ship at the center. Blair gave orders and his crew spread out to check the ship. He stayed outside.

The lightsail masts split Earth into quadrants. Cables connected the masts and led back to the main spar, but the sail was not designed to fill the gap. A universal joint connected the ship to the spar. In flight the sail spun like a windmill: black on one side, silver-gold on the other.

Blair plotted the course in his mind. Down toward the sun to build speed. Then around and out, run with the light, move north in a curved line, away to the ice fields. Sunlight and starlight, strobe light on the hull, flicker on the sails, the ship alive, renamed, rechristened, faster and faster....

"Universal joint seems all right, Jim."

"On-board computer seems all right. Had to replace two disks and an LCD pad. Seems to work now."

"Spars check out."

"Hydroponics empty, but the connections seem okay."

"Electrical"

"Hydraulic"

"Hermetic seals"

"Structurally sound"

"Sail material held up well"

"Maybe, Jim. We might be able to do it."

Blair ordered boosters from the jumpship. Crew welded them to the hull. They fired and *Lincoln/Lenin* broke orbit. Blair watched and waited. The universal joint moved, hesitated, then rotated steadily. He nodded. They could sail it.

The ship moved into a parking orbit around the cylinder. A shuttle took the crew home. Blair borrowed a jumppack and finished a final preliminary inspection.

... *starlight and sunlight and the rock below, cold and white, an ice mountain tinged with blue rainbows...*

He shrugged. He was a romantic and he thought he always would be a romantic. He stowed his notes in a pocket and went home.

The light hurt her eyes and Carol turned it down. Blair slumped in his chair and rubbed his sideburns. The crew list was down to one sheet.

"Shepard, Nam, Anderson, and Gonzalez. We agree on those," Carol said. Blair nodded.

"Yamaguchi?"

"No."

"Why? He's got enough experience."

"He's too good. I don't want to lose him."

Carol threw the paper on the table and leaned back. She dropped her head back and let her mouth open. Blair didn't move. Sleep period ended in two hours. She felt sand grind her eyes from behind.

"We need crew with experience. If this doesn't make it, it doesn't matter how many good people we have left."

"I know that," Blair said irritably. He shifted and stretched his legs. "Yamaguchi's got no sign of cancer. We'd waste him on this."

"Who do you want?"

"Antony Chiritas. He's got plenty of experience and a bad case of skin cancer. Doctor says he's going to die soon anyway."

"I don't know. He was the one who broke the water tank. Wasn't there something with his eyes? Blinded or something?"

"It's cleared. Doctor says his eyes are fine."

"He's good?"

"He's very good. Just that one accident. As good as Yamaguchi."

"How bad's his cancer?"

"He won't need pain killer until he comes back. He'll be fine for the mission."

Carol tapped the table with a pencil. She nodded, and wrote Antony's name on the crew list. She looked up.

"Why did you want him so bad? Is Yamaguchi really that good?"

Blair shrugged and shook his head. He stood.

"Chiritas came to see me this afternoon. He feels guilty and he's qualified. I did it as a favor."

"Some favor."

Blair looked at her. "You don't understand, do you? He's going to die anyway. A little sooner doesn't matter. Just so he gets even, and doesn't owe anybody anything when he goes."

"I don't understand."

"I didn't think you would."

Carol asked for suggestions for the new name for the ship, then put the five most popular up for a vote. The intense public interest surprised her. Oddsmakers set up a line on the names and she knew of several office pools. The inter-cylinder newstapes treated the mission as an adventure. They profiled the ship, the crew, Blair, and tried to interview her. She refused and wondered if she would ever understand her people.

She disapproved of the final name. It seemed too slick and it embarrassed her, but it was too late for her to change it. She thought *Lincoln/Lenin* was a perfectly good name but she was guest of honor at the christening of the good ship *Aquarius*.

The pre-launch festival was in the main plaza. It was twilight in the cylinder, the main mirror tilted to boost the ship, and strings of electric lights made a grid over the street.

Hands clapped slowly, rhythmically. A low, steady throb, heartbeat speed, vibrated in the air. The dancers, paired man/woman, swayed gently.

Suddenly a harmonica buzz-sawed, an accordion shouted hoarsely, and a tuba picked up the beat. Carol stood on a balcony, listened to the polka band and watched the dancers flash into a schottische, swirl and

revolve like pinwheels on a windy day.

Ramon weaved through the dance. He moved swiftly, almost frantically, from partner to partner. The moles on his legs and groin grew larger every week. It was too late for surgery. He danced swiftly, loved swiftly, worked swiftly. Carol remembered other men, other deaths.

"Enjoy the show?"

Carol turned. Blair smiled, raised his glass, and drank. He looked tired, a little pale, a little drunk, and his eyes were yellow and bloodshot. He needed a shower and his hair was dirty.

"They've been working hard. They need the entertainment."

"Bullshit," Blair said. He finished his drink and sat. He steepled his fingers and looked at her through them. "They're scared as hell."

"They don't seem scared. They don't act scared. What makes you so sure?"

"They're scared. They'll do anything now, so they don't have to be scared. Watch them. This is the first time they've faced disaster. Usually a disaster builds slowly and you can keep shuffling it on the next generation. This is a fast disaster and they can't avoid it."

"How do you know?"

"I'm one of them. That's how I feel."

Carol didn't like drunks. She turned and leaned on the railing. The dancers whirled and swirled, shirts and skirts bright under the lights.

"They should be scared. If we do get the water, all

we've done is come back to where we were. We're trying to walk up a downslide treadmill. We aren't self-sufficient. The ice will buy a little time, but every few years we'll need more ice. Someday the ship won't come back, or the cylinder computer will burn out, or we'll run out of fertilizer. Then the game is over. Done. The lights go out and there's no next generation."

She wanted him to leave so she could cry. She was always tired, but so many people needed decisions, needed a little piece of her.

"I want to go into deep space," he said. The ice cubes in his glass clinked. "I want to see the Sun from Mars, and Saturn's rings close-up. I want to orbit the Sun closer than Mercury. I want it all, but there's never enough fuel, or men, or time." The ice cubes clinked again and she heard him swallow.

"I'm sorry."

"Not half as sorry as I am," he said. He walked onto the balcony, faced her.

"You're right, you know. We need things we can't make, but everything we need is easy to find on Earth. If the ship returns we'll have plenty of water. Water is fuel. I know the shuttle manuals inside and out and I've trained on the simulator. Give me the fuel and I'll bring you everything we need, from Earth."

She looked at him. He wasn't drunk. The music and the foot rhythm drifted up to them.

"You're crazy. It's too big a risk."

"You defined the problem and one answer: war.

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Maybe next time it'll be a fertilizer or a processor chip war. All I know is there will be a next time. I'm offering a different answer."

"I don't know. I'll have to think about it."

He shrugged. "There's time. We can talk again when the ship comes back and we know how much ice there is."

"If they come back."

"They'll come back."

"Optimist."

He laughed. "What good is pessimism? If they don't return, we die. If they return, all the cards go back in the deck and we get a new hand. I can't stop us from dying, so why think about it? My soul is as ready as it will get. I worry about the good times; you worry about the bad."

The band stopped, picked up a different tune. Carol liked music with a steady beat. She tapped her foot to the rhythm. She saw Ramon leave with a young woman. He was on a last wild oats mission. She looked at Blair. She didn't feel so tired now.

"Would you like to dance?" she asked.

Crowds jammed every observation deck and most of the bars. Carol and Blair didn't want to fight the crowds or watch a screen. They went to his office, locked the door, chilled a very old bottle of champagne in the sink, and looked out the porthole.

The last work crew left *Aquarius*, jumpack bursts like fireflies. A booster flared briefly on the ship and *Aquarius* drifted slowly from the cylinder. Mission Control was in charge, but Blair listened intently on an eavesdrop line.

For a long time nothing seemed to happen. Then the lightsails spread to form the vanes of a windmill. The ship was in shadow, the sails dark shapes, and nothing moved.

Carol unwrapped the foil and eased the cork out of the bottle. She spun the glasses in ice, added wine, tasted. A little tart and astringent, but good. She filled the glasses, handed him one, and watched the porthole.

Boosters fired in dots and dashes, like Morse code. She heard babble on the eavesdrop line, then silence. She saw a long, sustained burst. A faint cheer echoed over the line. Blair listened intently and smiled. She drank her wine and waited.

She tried to ignore the countdown and kept her eyes on the ship. Plastic and metal shapes sprouted from it, clamps and hooks for ice. One ugly son-of-a-bitch, she thought. She toasted it silently.

The ship glided toward the main mirror. She noticed Blair's knuckles were white. She didn't look at her own. It was very quiet, only an occasional noise from the line.

Suddenly the sails flared gold. She blinked several times and squinted. Slowly, agonizingly slowly, the masts rotated. The ship didn't seem to move. Another booster fired.

Electric gold, shimmering and twirling, strobe light on the hull, star ripple on the sail, *Aquarius* began to accelerate. She realized she'd held her breath, and exhaled. The loud noise startled her.

"Go, baby," Blair said. It sounded like a prayer. "Go, go, go."

The room was dark except for the faint glow of a nightlight. Carol stared at the ceiling. She felt hot and sick and when she swallowed the saliva tasted coppery. The pills did not help. She rolled on her stomach and tried to relax.

Nothing was wrong, but nothing was completely right. The other cylinders traded for water, but the price was too high. Antony had finally found a suitable rock, but he was behind schedule and the Sun was more active than predicted. Medical said he was taking too much radiation and might have to cut the mission short. Another jumpship was in the shop and maintenance didn't know if they had enough of the right parts.

Blair muttered in his sleep and rolled onto his side. His elbow hit her in the side and seemed to churn her insides. She pushed the covers over next to him and sat on the edge of the bed, arms folded over her stomach. She stood and walked to the bathroom.

Carol bent over the toilet and vomited. Her legs shook and she knelt and braced her arms against the wall and vomited again. This time there was blood.

She leaned forward and rested her forehead on the metal. It felt cool and greasy. She rubbed her head back and forth. She was too tired to call for help. Her throat was dry.

"Oh my God," Blair said. She turned her head to see him and then back over the toilet. He stood over her and held her forehead until she finished.

He lowered her onto the floor on her side. She curled into the fetal position, chin rested on her knees. She felt cold and drained. Deep in her stomach a pain throbbed. She cramped while she listened to Blair call emergency.

"Don't die," Blair said. He sounded panicked. "For God's sake, Carol, don't die now. You've always been here. You can't just die."

Red and blue splashes flanked her vision. The room swayed to one side, then back, then around in a slow circle. Her saliva tasted coppery and she swallowed convulsively. She groaned.

Blair held and tried to cover her. She shivered, her stomach twisted, and she vomited a little blood.

"Carol," Blair said. "Carol."

A bright light shone in her eyes and she blinked and squinted. Something cold and sharp pinched her arm and the stomach pain subsided. The medic stood and spoke to the technicians.

"Be careful with her. Something's busted inside, she's hemorrhaging and she's in shock. She doesn't need any bumping around and be careful on the painkiller. I don't want her to get anything until we know what we're doing. If she starts to spasm use the muscle relaxants. I want her conscious as long as we can."

Carol felt herself lifted onto a stretcher. Blair stood beside her. She opened her mouth and tried to speak. He took her hand and squeezed gently. She lay back and tried to relax.

Antony watched the crew set the explosives and pull themselves hand-over-hand around the curve of the asteroid. His eyes hurt and he rubbed them. Sometimes, when tired, he squinted around red spots in the middle of his vision. A light on his board flashed. He pushed a button, the light went green, and the foreman waved his arms back and forth over his head. The crew settled behind cover.

Suddenly ice and rock geysered. Slow-motion cracks widened into crevices. The asteroid wobbled like a drunk on a waterslide and sunlight flashed staccato off the side of the ice pit. The crew stood and hand-walked to the pit. Antony noted the time and wrote it in the log.

The communications console beeped. Antony turned and logged on. The screen brightened and he saw Blair.

Antony was surprised. Blair was External Retrieval, not Mission Control. Only the Council or the Secretary could override section jurisdiction. Antony studied Blair's face during the transmission lag.

"You're out of your section, Jim," Antony said. Blair nodded.

"The Council met last night. I have authority over the mission until the Secretary returns."

"How is she?"

"Stabilized. The doctors seem to think she won't die this time."

"Has the Council picked a successor?"

"Not yet. They want to wait until she's back to help."

Antony waited. Blair sat at his desk and said nothing. Antony broke first.

"We have to come home, Jim. It's that simple. We've taken too much radiation."

"You haven't got a full load yet."

"My God, Jim, don't tell me what I've got and what I don't have. I know I'm behind schedule, but we can come back with a different crew now that we know this rock's orbit. We'll bring back enough water this time to carry the cylinder until we return and get a full load."

"Would your crew be able to make the return trip?" Blair asked.

"No. You'd need a different crew. We've taken too much radiation. But you'd get here faster, have more time to load, the second time."

"And then I won't be able to use either crew again. You want me to use twice as many men, and twice as much time, to get one load you can get yourselves. No, Antony. I am short on men and time. I will not do it."

Antony looked out the port and saw the crew set the scoops. They moved slowly, but their shadows flickered and danced like flame.

"Every day we stay out here is two less we have at home. You're killing us."

"I'm sorry, Antony. Will you follow the order?"

"Some of them may not return alive. We're almost out of suppressant drugs."

"Will you obey the order?"

"I'm a volunteer, but they aren't. What about

(Continued to page 57)

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Literary Fantasy



In the current issue of *The New York Review of Science Fiction* (which I am sure our Noble Editor will not mind me plugging, since it is a review and opinion magazine, and not really competition), Rebecca Brown Ore, the award-nominated author of *Becoming Alien*, tells how she doesn't read much science fiction anymore. Back in the 1960s, when the more "literary" anthologies like *New Dimensions* and *Orbit* were shooting off sparks, she did, taking SF in the same stride with the other arts: everything from Allen Ginsberg to the Velvet Underground to *avant-garde* painting. But when the anthology field was ruined by Roger Elwood, she and readers like her quietly went away, because SF "had lost its intellectual excitement."

She posits that right alongside the fanatical gobble-up-anything audience there is another, smaller audience which has much higher standards. (Her figures are 500,000 vs. 100,000.) This audience will read SF when it verges on mainstream "literary" fiction. "The more the field is exciting," she says, "the better the writers, the more people who wouldn't usually read or write SF will do so." But this upper fringe readership won't hang on if editors dumb everything down to the lowest common denominator.

Rating System

☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

It's a challenging article, which should be read (write to *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, P.O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570), and which, to my mind, posits an interesting corollary, which, stated simply, goes like this:

Does the same thing apply to fantasy?

The answer is, of course, yes. It does. But fantasy, alas, became a publishing genre not under the enlightened guidance of Ian and Betty Ballantine in the 1950s (who started out their SF paperback line with things like *Childhood's End* and *More Than Human*), but under the auspices of the del Reys in the mid-'70s (who started with Terry Brooks). So contemporary, category fantasy is almost totally dumbed down to the level of adolescent romances and Tolkien clones. What is the more advanced reader, the equivalent of Ore's fringe science-fiction reader, to do when looking for something more aesthetically nourishing than *The X of Y Trilogy, Volume 4*?

There are two answers. The first is read old books. But once you've read all of T.H. White and E.R. Eddison and James Branch Cabell, and even the short stories of William Butler Yeats, you go on to answer number two, which is you turn to the mainstream.

Sure enough, at the very time that generic fantasy seems to have ossified to the point of utter lifelessness, the *mainstream*, the folks who in their own provincial way call what they do "real literature" and the rest of the world "commercial trash," has rediscovered fantasy. Mark Halprin desperately denies that he

writes fantasy (presumably meaning he doesn't do Tolkien clones), but fantasy readers looking for something better than the latest paperback trilogies read *A Winter's Tale*. They also turn to the late John Gardner (*Grendel, Freddy's Book*), to (the also late) Sylvia Townsend Warner, and to more South American writers than I care to name. (Well, a few: Marquez, Borges, Mujica-Lainez, Fuentes — and the Spaniard Felix Marti-Ibanez, author of *All the Wonders We Seek*, which falls more into the Old Books category unless someone will reprint it.) There is a lesson here, I think. There is also some reassurance that the reader dissatisfied with contemporary generic fantasy doesn't have as far to look (no further than the Strand basement, if you're in New York) as does the dissatisfied SF reader.

The academic buzz-word for it all is "magic realism." What needs to be explored in some detail — and I am not yet well-read enough to do so convincingly — is whether or not this constitutes more than a buzz-word. Is it merely the equivalent of the 1960s SF writers who called their work "speculative fiction" in order to distance it from the usual *Analog*-and-Ace-Doubles stuff, or does it constitute a distinctly new and different school of fantasy?

Preliminary data suggest the latter. The typical "magic realist" intrudes the fantastic into the contemporary and everyday world without any rationale at all. The effect is more like surrealist painting than *Unknown Worlds*

storytelling. (And no, we should not wonder if this is a refutation of the *Unknown* school, since it's unreasonable to expect most of the writers have ever heard of John Campbell.) Each story makes sense, but only its own, distorted sense. Characters do not try to analyze the resultant weirdness, but live with it. They take it for granted. If J.G. Ballard's "The Drowned Giant" had been written by a South American and published in a literary magazine, it would be quintessential magic realism. So the genre/label problem is a hazy one, but I think there is really something behind it, which deserves investigation — and your attention, if you, like me, can hardly even imagine reading *The X of Y Trilogy, Volume 4*.

In one sense these mainstream fantasy/magic-realist writers are very traditional. They are doing something which goes all the way back to Apuleius and maybe further. They use fantasy not to escape from life, but to comment on it. They hold a funhouse mirror up to nature, and in it we see ourselves.

The Satanic Verses
By Salman Rushdie
Viking, 1988
547 pp., \$19.95

I don't have to explain. This is probably the most famous unread book in the world today. I confess that I had my eye on this one before the trouble started. A review in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* made it sound interesting. I probably would have requested a review copy, and, failing that, waited for the thing to be remaindered (or for someone else's review copy to turn up at half price in the Strand basement). But after the fuss, I rushed out and bought one to do my bit. A common enough act. It's reading the thing which seems to be revolutionary these days.

The Satanic Verses is a fine fantasy novel of the "magic realist" mode. The basic premise everyone knows from the dust-jacket flap. A terrorist bomb destroys a plane over England, and two Indian actors plummet to Earth. But they don't die. Instead, one, who has spent much of his ca-

reer acting in the Indian equivalent of biblical epics, is transformed into an angelic being. The other (who does funny voices for a popular TV show called *The Aliens*) becomes a particularly smelly, goat-like devil. Gibreel, the angel, has a series of fantastic visions/experiences, in which he plays the role of angel for the prophet Mohammed, again for a certain revolutionary Imam, and for various other characters. The devil, Saladin, has a much rougher time of it, first with vicious immigration officers who don't seem to care that this particular "Paki" has cloven hooves. The two transformed actors meet a strange Englishwoman who keeps seeing ghosts of William the Conqueror's army and so takes Gibreel and

they are neither English nor Indian) and the fantastic.

Rushdie is using this material, of course, to talk about the real world, his own experience, and — like any serious writer in any genre — his own perception of how things work. Is *The Satanic Verses* blasphemous? Well, the first thing I'll say is that he is neither the first nor last writer in the history of literature to lose his faith and turn the result into art. If an ex-Christian writer had written a scene in which a madman, undergoing apparently supernatural experiences, seems to be replaying various New Testament scenes, even if the whole thing had a skewed, almost Monty-Pythonesque point of view, I suspect it would pass without comment in the West. Christian fundamentalists don't read literary fantasies.

Then again, Muslims have a taboo against depicting the Prophet *at all*, and Rushdie, an apostate from the Muslim point of view, certainly broke that rule. And the *politics* of this novel are more complicated. Khomeini can't have been pleased by the scene in which the Imam, who has a sexual fetish for the empress of the regime he's overthrowing, is turned into a caricatured supernatural bad guy on the order of the wicked witch from the Disney *Snow White*.

In a recent interview in *Bomb* magazine, Rushdie denies that the Imam is Khomeini or that his opponent is the Shah — I'm not sure I believe him — for all that he admits that the Imam sequence does reflect his views of the Iranian revolution: that a tremendous victory was won, then the revolution devoured its children. "How religion, which is after all one of the great codifications of good human beings have invented, can become a force for evil."

He also tells how the novel began as a fantasy. The original idea was a biography of the Archangel Gabriel. His concept of fantasy requires that the fantastic be strongly rooted in the real. "Dickens," he says, "can use very surreal imagery, but set it in a completely known and credible London. If those roots weren't there, the fantasy wouldn't work."

But he also tells how he was



Saladin for two more apparitions. Sort of. All of the apparitions/transformation/ghostly goings-on seem to be specially tailored to the characters' cultural identities and expectations. (Which is why the Englishwoman sees her very traditional ghosts in a traditional way, while Gibreel and Saladin get things all mixed up.)

Actually, this is like trying to summarize *Moby Dick* in a paragraph. Or think of it as *Moby Dick* in the manner of John Sladek. It's a very rich book. "Reality" in the course of the story is even more fleeting than it usually is in a Philip K. Dick novel. There is much wit and invention, with a deft mixing of the realistic (much about Indians in Britain losing their culture until

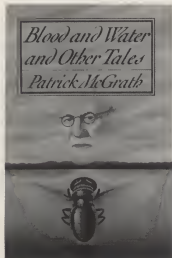
brought up on traditional Indian stories and *The Arabian Nights*. "Flying horses and invisible cloaks," he says, seem to be "the birthplace of stories."

Rating: ★★★★★

Blood and Water and Other Tales

By Patrick McGrath
Poseidon Press, 1988
192 pp., \$15.95

This one is getting a bit of genre-recognition. It's even a finalist for the Horror Writers of America's Bram Stoker Award (Best Collection). There's a quote from Clive Barker on the back of the jacket. I even spotted the paperback in the horror section of a bookstore recently.



McGrath is (probably reflecting his literary-magazine background) too arch, too emotionally distant from his horrific subject matter. But at his best, he is one of the most inventive weird/fantastic writers around. You'll not forget the man driven to suicide by tiny apparitions of Sigmund Freud, or the basement cult of blood-crazed anemics, or the strange, rotting "angel" who would commiserate with Lovecraft's Dr. Munoz of "Cool Air." In the purely magic-realist mode, there's a story of a little English girl who finds a dying explorer in the back yard. In his reality, he is in the Congo. She takes him to her bedroom, he dies there, and she has to bury him, but she never manages to share any of the experience with her parents. It's a secret between the two of them, even after the explorer's death, when he reappears as a ghost. Then there's "The Black Hand of the Raj," the most grotesque curse-from-the-colonies seen since Edward Lucas White's "Lukundoo." (But not as effective. This is one where McGrath is just a bit too distant.)

A slightly uneven selection, but the best are very good indeed. It's always a joy to discover a new writer like this.

Rating: ★★★★★

Sleeping in Flame

By Jonathan Carroll
Doubleday, 1989
273 pp., \$17.95

Carroll is an outsider who is now widely known within the fantasy genre. It didn't use to be so. His first book, *The Land of Laughs*, was published by Viking in 1980 and went straight to the remainder tables. There a few devoted fantasy fans found it and (I am told) pushed it on various New York editors until a paperback finally came out from Ace. Even then, all was not easy. The second Carroll novel, *Voice of Our Shadow*, did not appear in paperback until very recently. The third, *Bones of the Moon*, was indeed published as a fantasy, in the Arbor House line. Now *Sleeping in Flame* is published just as a Doubleday book, not as Doubleday/Foundation/Spectra. (And the Doubleday publicity

department seems determined to keep it out of the hands of SF/fantasy reviewers. After several requests came to naught, I broke down and bought the thing.) So Carroll is in an odd position indeed. He won a World Fantasy Award. (But then that is the most literarily broad of our genre awards; I'll never forget the embarrassing audience reactions of "Wha? Huh? Who?" when they gave Life Achievement to Italo Calvino back in 1982.)

Now we see Carroll interviewed on the front page of *Locus*. He has even attended a couple of British conventions. But he is still not a regular, category fantasist. (Interestingly, he considers his work to be magic realism.) Carroll



writes what he has to write and waits for categories to catch up with him. I particularly like the way he expresses it: "I've been whistling a certain tune for a long time, being told that's off-tune — now all of a sudden people are saying, 'What's that catchy tune?'"

To continue the musical metaphor further, though, there is some danger that Carroll will become a one-note writer. This will not detract from his prior accomplishment. *The Land of Laughs* is wonderful, brilliant, one of the all-time great fantasies. *Voice of Our Shadow* and *Bones of the Moon* are very fine, if flawed to a greater or lesser degree. But all these books are about artistically

But the stories are from literary magazines: *The Quarterly*, *Confrontation*, *The Missouri Review*, and *Bomb* (the same magazine which ran the Rushdie interview). McGrath is, we are told, "a Poe for the '80s, the first post-modern Gothic storyteller."

That, Dear Reader, is so much hype, written from a Literary Establishment point of view fully as provincial as any fan's. (My immediate response is, "What about Dennis Etchison?" My second response, after reading the book, was that at least half these stories could have been published in *Weird Tales*.)

The stories, however, deserve your attention. At his worst,

sensitive, somewhat depressed but very witty and interesting people coping with some fantastic (but very personal) intrusion into their lives. The typical Carroll book begins realistically, with deft characterizations, emotional involvements that actually involve the reader, and so on, until, about half-way through, something supernatural happens. It is both subtle and a shock. Surely one of the great moments in fantasy occurred a little over half-way through *The Land of Laughs* (a book about fantasy and the love of fantasy, but not overtly fantastic to that point) when the various attempts to recreate the spirit and life of a dead fantasist have grown just strong enough that a dog begins to

to life. Much of the typical Carroll magic is there. It isn't his best novel, by any means, but it is still better than most of us will ever write. Yet as soon as one can start talking about the plot and structure of a "typical" Jonathan Carroll novel, something is clearly wrong. Part of the impact of *The Land of Laughs* was that it was like no other previous book. Now these later novels are getting rather alike.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Noted:

The Book of Fantasy
 Edited by Jorge Luis Borges,
 Silvina Ocampo, and A. Bioy
 Casares
 Viking, 1968
 384 pp., \$19.95

This has an odd patch-work feel to it. Take a compilation made by Borges and friends in 1937. Add a few modern stories (such as "The Drowned Giant") and assorted notes (By Borges? By Casares? By some editor at Viking?) and tack on an admittedly interesting essay by Ursula Le Guin as an introduction. I wonder how much it resembles the original, and reflects the mind of one of the century's great fantasists.

But simply as a book of the strange and fantastic, the results are pretty good. There are a lot of standard stories and authors here (Poe, Machen, Dunsany, Beer-bohm), but many rare items too, including many South American writers of the '30s, ancient Chinese authors, a medieval Spaniard, etc. Borges seems to have picked stories — and often very short fragments, scenes, and snippets — on the basis of imagery: strange, paradoxical snapshots much like the ones found in his own fiction. The overall book gives one an appreciation of just how universal fantasy is. For the would-be fantasist, there is much to ponder.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

North of Yesterday
 By Thomas McEvilley
 McPherson & Co., 1987
 223 pp., \$10.00

Why review a 1987 book now?

Why bring up a title you've never heard of just to trash it? Normally such would be a useless exercise. But it lends this particular column a sense of balance. I don't want you to think that I've got a bad case of Greener Pastures Syndrome, praising everything "outsiders" do at the expense of the usual genre writers. You've seen that happen before.

Well, here's a stinker, by a bona-fide mainstream avant-gardist, art critic, classicist, etc. I do a lot of exploratory reading, picking up things that look like fantasy but which aren't classified as such. If I discover something, I tell people about it.

This one came into my hands in the most round-about way. Some



reviewer donated it to a bookstore run by the Friends of the Free Library in Philadelphia. Then the store got kicked out of its spot in 30th Street Station. They had to give their books away. The result was a bibliophilic feeding-frenzy. I made off with several hundred books. I grabbed all the trade-paperback "art" fiction to use as money in the local book exchanges. Some which looked of particular interest, I kept, including this one.

But, alas. It's completely unreadable. What purports to be a dream novel, involving somehow the late classical writer Quintus of Smyrna, turns out to be clumsy stream-of-consciousness junk, by someone whose grasp of the



But, alas. It's completely unreadable. What purports to be a dream novel, involving somehow the late classical writer Quintus of Smyrna, turns out to be clumsy stream-of-consciousness junk, by someone whose grasp of the

English sentence is often dubious. I'd quote some of it just to show you, but we're running out of room.
Rating: No stars.

The Horror in the Museum
By H.P. Lovecraft
Arkham House, 1989
450 pp., \$18.95

Was Lovecraft a "literary" writer? Never mind. The distinction ultimately doesn't mean anything. In the end, there are only stories. Lovecraft is certainly finding his way into the world's literature, translated into many languages, influencing many writers (including Borges, who wrote "There Are Such Things" as an affectionate tribute to the Old Gent), and ultimately becoming part of the general cultural vocabulary of mankind. Just like Poe or Kipling or Kafka or whoever.

But if a writer is to be part of our common heritage, we must have accurate texts. This new, corrected edition is the last in the definitive Lovecrafts, as assembled by the noted scholar S.T. Joshi. *The Horror in the Museum* is the last of the four standard Lovecraft volumes, a collection of HPL's "revisions" of other people's work (which he did for pitances) amounting to collaborations or even outright ghost-writing. There is virtually nothing of the alleged author (Zealia Bishop) in "The Mound." It is ninety-nine percent Lovecraft and published here in its entirety for the first time.

Even more importantly, this edition drops one story from the canon and adds no less than five. They aren't always great work (in fact some are appalling), but we must have them, even as we must have *Titus Andronicus*.

Rating: ★★★★★ □

Editor's Notes

(Continued from page 9)

Finally, the biggest problem of all with guppy corporations is that they plan and think short term.

Remember, big corporations are run by accountants. Accountants want to guarantee shareholders a profit every quarter, so this means less for research, more

for quick turnarounds.

This isn't just true for media empires.

It's even more true for manufacturing corporations.

It's why America has slipped in the world marketplace.

The Japanese have been beating us because instead of planning for the next quarter, they have been planning for the next decade. The Japanese government has subsidized long-range planning institutes that work hand-in-hand with industry.

What made America great was that an inventor or entrepreneur with an idea, an idea that was new, or different, or just a bit better than what was available, could persevere until that idea matured, until it succeeded.

But ideas don't come cheap. Ideas sometimes take five or ten years to ripen into fruition.

If the accountants had been in charge, the word Xerox wouldn't mean anything today. It took years before the original geographic process matured into a workable

machine that had a useful, and profitable, application. And then it mushroomed into a larger market than anyone at the company imagined.

If the accountants had been running the show, we would never have gone to the moon and, as a result, computer technology wouldn't be even a tenth of what it is today.

If the accountants had been in charge, we would never have launched this magazine.

That's because accountants aren't paid to have vision. They are concerned with balancing the books and turning a profit. That's their job. And that's why they should be listened to, but also why they should never be in charge.

They don't take risks.

But the future will never be different from the past if new ideas aren't tried, if some risks aren't taken.

And that's where science fiction lives — in the future, taking risks and ducking the ultimate guppy. □

Missing issues 4 & 5?

OK, so we ain't perfect. Somehow, in stacking issues of the magazines from the printers, we buried one box each of issues 4 and 5. We now have 25 of each of them left, but that's it.

So here's what we decided to do: For a very limited time (until we run out of the 25 copies) we will sell a complete set of *Aboriginal Science Fiction's* first two years, issues 1-12, for \$50, plus \$5 shipping by UPS. We will only honor this offer as long as copies last, so hurry if you want the missing issues. If you only want issues 4 and 5, then we are forced to charge \$17 for the pair, plus \$3 for UPS shipping. We will only ship these UPS because we don't want any of the rare copies lost in the mail. Please note that



UPS will not deliver to a P.O. Box, so you need to give us a street address. To repeat: To just order copies of issues 4 & 5, send \$20. To order the complete set of 12 issues, send \$55. We will not sell 4 & 5 separately, only as a pair. By the way, hang on to your copies of issue 13 (Jan.-Feb. 1989) because issue 13 is completely sold out. To order 4 & 5 or the complete set, send your payment to:

Aboriginal SF
Missing Issues
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Woburn, MA 01888-0849

You'll Hear from My Lawyer

When our planet's last lawsuit took place, two generations ago, it was considered such an unusual event that everybody was given a holiday to watch it on the video. I remember the two lawyers, and how unfortunate they considered themselves to have a lawsuit occur during their lifetimes. They both retired after that, of course, and had to be replaced. When the lottery was held, and the two new lawyers were named, their families changed their names and moved to different cities.

Here on Earth, in the United States, lawyering is actually considered honorable work. People who do it are respected, given handsome incomes, and made into fantasy objects on various television shows. Most American human beings would jump at the chance to become lawyers, and, in fact, you can't throw a rock in this country without hitting an attorney (not that you would, given the likelihood of a lawsuit). There are well over half a million lawyers here. If the Americans decided to deport them *en masse*, the lawyers could found a country larger than Luxembourg. Few people would want to risk living there, of course, for they would no doubt duplicate the American legal system.

The American legal system is a quintessentially human institution, in that it is designed to create opportunities for people to lay claim to each other's property. As near as I can tell, it works something like this. If you were a human being and you took a liking to your neighbor's car, you would hire a lawyer and sue your neighbor to turn the car over to you. As soon as you and your lawyer begin proceedings, your neighbor must hire a lawyer to protect himself from

your claim. Then the lawyers get together and decide which of them will take the car, billing you and your neighbor for the time they spend doing it. Once they decide, one of them drives away in the car, your neighbor finishes the payments on it, and you continue taking the bus so you can save up for another lawyer and a try at somebody else's car.

As a service business, laying claim to other people's property has grown considerably over the past generation. Like many lucrative businesses, it has seduced its principals into pricing themselves out of the market. Thus there is an emerging group of entrepreneurs dedicated to "eliminating the middleman." These are people who will offer to drop their claims against your property in return for a modest out-of-court fee, thereby saving you the cost of hiring a lawyer to defend it.

Among these are the professional patent protectors. The United States Patent Office, you see, is promiscuous and will allow almost anyone to patent almost anything. It is therefore possible to patent a variety of insubstantial fantasies in hopes that some working fool will offer to the market a product resembling one of them.

Your patent doesn't have to be very good, and you don't have to be capable of bringing it to market. You just have to have a patent registration number to get your business started. The professional patent protectors know that a well-capitalized company suffers enormous costs when it undergoes a lawsuit and that any responsible manager will always trade a high-cost alternative for one of lower cost. The going rate for re-

nouncing patent claims in favor of corporations is approximately \$50,000. If a human being keeps his overhead down, two or three such settlements a year will allow him to live in an affluent suburb and drive a Porsche. A number of them do.

The professional patent protectors are exceptional, however. By and large, the only human beings who are able to make use of the legal system to get a living are lawyers. My calculations indicate that in the United States the legal industry realizes a greater aggregate income than the agricultural sector, which is an interesting commentary on human priorities when you realize that a portion (admittedly small) of the agricultural sector is dedicated to producing something.

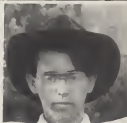
It's a remarkable species that would devote an appreciable fraction of its resources to the support of a group whose business it is to gamble with everybody else's property. But then very little surprises me about these creatures, especially when it comes to baseball.

Last year, engineers of the premier manufacturer of baseballs in this country came up with a new baseball that had all the characteristics of the standard baseball but was capable of producing fewer injuries. It seems that some baseball players are injured by baseballs each year, and it is a matter of some urgency to the human beings that they protect

(Continued to page 25)



Will the Real Alien Please Stand Up?



There are five schools of thought on how to recognize a real alien.

School #1 — an alien will look like Julius Caesar, come from the planet Xyssegery, wear an aluminum foil spacesuit, and be full of nasty habits like eating worms and planets. Important note: his name should be as unpronounceable as that of his planet, sound vaguely Latin, and he must have bulging muscles (sinewy muscles are even better).

School #2 — same as School #1, but an extra pair of arms has been sewn on. Truly daring neoexobiologists have suggested that he might even be a she. True visionaries speculate that the alien may actually be a he/she and lay eggs that have a tendency to lodge in the throats of unsuspecting humans.

School #3 — same as School #1, but before being stuffed into the spaceship, he is first stuffed into the carapace of a six-foot-tall cockroach. Credibility is enhanced if he leaves behind a trail of slime.

School #4 — Aliens can be made up of pure energy, chunks of neutron stars, agglomerations of quarks, virus-plagued computer chips, leftover threads from the big bang, or quantum dots (didn't you read my last column?).

School #5 — open up your refrigerator, peel back the aluminum foil on the potato salad that Aunt Henrietta brought by last Christmas, and if something crawls out that you could have never possibly imagined, it might just be a real alien.

Which School is right?

The answer should be obvious.

School #5.

You don't believe me? Let me explain.

The universe makes real aliens. Imagination makes fictional aliens. If the cosmos can create a creature that will send in twenty bucks for a black velvet painting of Elvis and a set of steak knives to a post office box in Las Vegas, how can you possibly hope to second-guess what else it's capable of producing? Fortunately, you don't have to, because I've given it a great deal of thought — that's what I'm here for, to ponder just this type of question.

How are real aliens made?

Physics comes first — that means the physical environment that your alien finds itself evolving from. The refrigerator, which plays such a crucial role to those who believe in School #5, is the environment in which our little thought experiment will take place. It's an environment of fixed temperature, fixed humidity (that is, as long as you keep the door closed — no midnight snacks, please), no light (I must take this strictly on faith, having never actually witnessed the phenomenon from the inside), an atmosphere of roughly 78 percent nitrogen, 18 percent oxygen, and 4 percent essence of spoiled milk, potatoes, mayonnaise, milk, salt, pepper, paprika, and Aunt Henrietta's secret ingredient that insures you will have a lingering memory of her potato salad for days after you've actually managed to swallow it.

And that's it.

That environment will define the type of alien life that will be spawned — it sets the limits on the permissible biology. Wait a million years, a billion years, or even a

trillion years, and Julius Caesar is not going to walk out of your refrigerator.

No way.

Not even if we let him have extra arms.

The physics of that environment will not permit it.

Then what exactly will walk out?

Let's play what if. Let's think about biology, the kind of biology that could exist in that environment. We're lucky here. We didn't have to start off with some mysterious hot and young planet full of hydrogen and ammonia, or some spinning neutron star whose magnetic field is on the verge of achieving self-awareness. We're in your refrigerator. For argument's sake, let's assume that your refrigerator is of planetary dimensions, the potato salad is of oceanic proportions, and that the shelves, along with all the goodies they contain, act as continents.

We need a few other starting conditions.

I'll choose.

In that potato salad, despite Aunt Henrietta's best hygienic efforts, there are a few *E. coli* bacteria. But they're having trouble. They like it where it is nice and warm, somewhere down in your gut. They weren't designed for the cold of your refrigerator. What we need is a mutant, a mighty *E. coli* with a few of its genes tweaked so that it can thrive in cold potato salad. And we're in luck. Aunt Henrietta got a real deal on those potatoes — ten pounds for a buck, originating straight from some place called Chernobyl Farms. They're spewing out a whole range of atomic debris, and a single alpha particle pulverizes one lone

E. coli square in the genes that regulate its metabolism. That's all it takes. It can now eat twice the potato salad of any of its neighbors, and as a result has twice the number of offspring, all with the same hunger for potato salad.

Conquest of the potato salad seas has begun.

And where does it end?

We'll call it *E. coli sapiens*.

It's about a half a foot tall (anything taller and it'd bash into the shelf above itself), has something that resembles antifreeze for blood, naturally has no eyes since it's totally dark in the refrigerator, but sees by a highly evolved sense of smell (a necessity when existing in an environment that includes what must be million-year-old spoiled milk), has dozens of tentacle-like arms ending in little scaled claws that permit it to simultaneously pop open a half dozen beers while clinging upside down from an aluminum wire shelf. It has a long prehensile snout complete with filter that allows it to snort down lime-green Jell-O filled with fruit cocktail, while filtering out those disgusting little soggy green grapes. And of course, it is covered in thick fur (would you want to be stark naked, with your backside pressing up against a cold head of lettuce?). Sex simply doesn't exist for it. When they eat enough, they simply splatter, and the little tidbits start growing into a new *E. coli sapiens*. That's the most efficient, since any kind of sex would generate far too much heat, and have long ago destroyed the refrigerator world. *E. coli sapiens* does not simply survive in the refrigerator environment, it thrives. The environment dictated the biology that would be best suited for the refrigerator world. Physics dictated that biology, but what do biology and physics dictate? Answer: culture.

Brain cells have reached critical density, and awareness fills *E. coli sapiens*. It's survival of the mental fittest, only the most intelligent able to figure out how to pry that first dill pickle out of an overpacked jar, which in turn allows it to be the first to stuff itself and then to be splattered across the refrigerator walls, insuring that those superior genes will be quick-

ly passed on to future generations. What questions do they ponder? What lies beyond these plastic walls? Are those with odd numbers of tentacles truly inferior? Why is there evil in the world such as yogurt and that scum that grows around the lip of ketchup bottles? Why must all *E. coli sapiens* eventually splatter? Why does the fizz go out of my beer before I can finish it off? A whole subclass of *E. coli sapiens*, a type of priesthood, devotes itself to answering these questions. All of them quickly claim to know the truth. They fight battles, create nations, and develop nerve gasses based on moldy Limburger cheese — all of this, in order to propagate their beliefs.

Is all this a bit insane?

Perhaps not.

I'd bet my last dollar that I'd find something resembling *E. coli sapiens* lurking in the back of my refrigerator long before an alien from Xyssegcry, looking like a refugee from a Japanese monster movie, shows up wanting to vaporize our planet and steal our women. Think of it this way. Pretend if you can that you are *E. coli sapiens*, lazing in a bowl of leftover baked beans, when suddenly your world is shattered with a blast of heat, and this smelly monstrous beast

reaches in a massive paw, grabbing for a beer. You could have never imagined such a creature, never imagined a world that could ever have created such a beast. It is beyond your most vivid imagination.

You cannot create a real alien, not even by using my well-thought-out physics-biology-culture approach. At best it will only be an approximation. But it's as close as you can get, at least for now, until we actually stumble across something truly alien, and by some miracle are able to realize that even though the thing looks like a brass doorknob, likes to eat Cheez Whiz and neutrinos, and multiplies by nuclear fission, that it is in fact an intelligent creature.

So give it a shot.

For inspiration I suggest checking beneath your kitchen sink, right there behind the roach motel, or for those with exceptionally strong constitutions, you might consider taking a peek inside that old pizza box wedged behind your washing machine.

Let me know what you find.

One last thing to remember: real aliens can't stand up. They've got no legs. That's a fact. I know. *E. coli sapiens* told me so. □

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 23)

these people, particularly the younger ones, who are known as Little Leaguers.

The company's management was delighted with the new baseball, since it was not in any way different from the old one, aside from being safer. (Except in the case of automobiles, a human business that offers a safer product will invariably realize increased sales and an improved revenue position.) In addition to anticipating increased sales from a safer baseball, the firm's management was old-fashioned and believed that if the company could make products that were less likely to injure its customers, it ought to. It doesn't sound like human thinking, I know, but you know by now how difficult it is to predict these creatures.

There are certain procedures that a company must complete be-

fore releasing a new product, however, and the company's management consulted its legal staff about the new baseball. The lawyers advised management against releasing the product. Their reasoning? By selling a safer baseball, the company would be admitting that the old baseballs were unsafe and make itself liable for injury claims from previous customers.

As tortured as it sounds to our ears, this was responsible advice on the part of the company's lawyers. They knew that this line of reasoning would have great appeal to the legal community, as does any reasoning that gives one person a pretext for assuming the assets and property of another. They were only trying to protect their company from risk.

The company's management decided to introduce the new baseball anyway.

You figure it out, I can't. □

The Bob Dylan Solution

By Walter Jon Williams

Art by Pat Morrissey

Pus-yellow smog drifts through the artificial canyons of Hollywood like windblown sand silting over the foundations of a Western ghost town. Anything moving below the smog curtain is invisible, certainly insignificant. Robertson takes a certain satisfaction in the thought.

"I've heard the songs Sorrel's recorded so far," says Brenner. "They're a mess, I agree with you. He's spending millions in studio time and the project isn't even near completion. A disaster."

"The computer projections aren't encouraging." Robertson, staring down at the smog from his air-conditioned aerie, feels a reflex irritation at the back of his throat. Suddenly he's glad he gave up smoking. He clears his throat. "The whole middle-class rebellion thing is dying out. The declining economy won't support it. People are too interested in hanging onto their jobs to worry about ideology." He clears his throat again. "Sorrel's career peaked two albums ago. He's going to lose his audience in the next eighteen months. Something has to happen to make him recast his message. He needs to go affirmative."

"The psych profiles aren't good, either." Hose-covered thighs sing against one another as Brenner crosses her legs. "He's losing his inspiration. Velda isn't helping. He needs something to shake him up, jump-start his creativity. Move him in a new direction."

Robertson nods. Sorrel had been his discovery, the means by which he had ascended from among the smog-bound probes below to the highest penthouse atop the Lizard Records building. But what happens when talent uses itself up?

"Velda," Brenner says, "could have an accident." Her voice is tentative.

"He'll find someone else just like her. Veldas aren't hard to find. Then we're in the same bind."

Robertson turns away from the transparent, bulletproof, evolved-aluminum window and steps towards his desk. He opens a drawer and takes out an atomizer of throat spray. He sprays his throat carefully, thrice. Brenner opens her compact and stares into the mirror.

"You know what to do," Robertson says.

Brenner, fluffing her hair, gives a single, precise nod.

ii

Brenner's office is covered with diagrams of road accidents. Semitrucks, cars, motorcycles, all with little arrows, notations of velocity and direction. X-rays of broken skulls are stuck to the evolved-aluminum window with Scotch tape. Labels are affixed: Dean, Berry, Dylan, Clift, Allman. "The chief variable," Brenner says, "is Sorrel's speed. We can't control that. That's why I recommend Scenario Four. If we keep him boxed in, we can control his speed up until the moment he swings out to pass the truck."

"Good work," Robertson says.

Brenner purses her lips doubtfully. "There are risks."

Robertson opens his briefcase, removes some graphs. "This sequence displays posthumous earnings by major stars. James Dean's biggest movie was after he died. Hendrix, Elvis, Joplin, Holly, Croce ... they all made more money for their estates than they ever did for themselves."

"Jan and Dean," Brenner says.

"That was before we had modern PR techniques. Besides," dropping the graphs on the desk top, "we insured the hell out of Sorrel before we let him into the studio."

Brenner looks at the graphs. "Looks like a go."

"I've already got Publicity working on the campaign for the posthumous album. Just in case things go wrong. We can get some studio hacks to fix up those uncompleted tapes. He'll sound more like himself than ever."

Brenner glances up. "The only problem," she says, "is who gives him the motorcycle?"

Robertson looks at her. "Why not Velda?"

Brenner thinks about it for a moment, then smiles. "Why not?"

iii

Velda closes her lips on a Virginia Slims sticking out of the pack, draws the pack away with a clean, perfect motion of her hand. The cigarette dances in the corner of her mouth as she speaks. "I want to be executor," she says. Robertson's mouth is watering at the thought of the cigarette, old habits dying hard.

Brenner shakes her head. "Too much."

Velda lights the cigarette. Her twenty-eight-carat diamond engagement ring sparkles in the blue and



amber spots of the corporate lounge. "I want to see where the money goes. You're already insured for the lost studio time. You won't lose money there."

Robertson looks from one to the other. "Co-executor," he says.

Velda blows twin curls of smoke from her chiseled ex-model nostrils. Her gray eyes gaze clearly into Robertson's. "Draw up the papers," she says. "I'll find them among Sorrel's effects if it's necessary."

iv

Sorrel looks in baffled astonishment at the motorcycle standing in front of his door, a dark, ominous, retro-figured shape standing between clusters of frangipani. Here in the canyons behind L.A., the smog is only a memory and the blue sky reflects off the bike like a distant ocean horizon.

"Vincent Black Shadow," Velda says. "I thought you deserved it."

Sorrel gives an amazed grin. He steps out into the hot California sun and straddles the bike. His rosy arms reach for the handlebars.

"I gotta get some pictures," Sorrel says. "Me in a leather jacket."

Velda shakes her head. "Leather jackets are for wimps. You want denim."

Sorrel considers this. "Yeah."

"And a headband. Definitely a headband."

"Yeah!" There's a light in Sorrel's eyes.

Velda steps up to the bike, puts her arm around Sorrel's shoulders, kisses him. "Go crazy, man," she says.

The stunt drivers have been practicing in the canyon for five days.

V

"S-Day's tomorrow," Brenner says. The diagram of the accident — Scenario Four — lies open across her lap.

Robertson sprays his throat, coughs. "The PR team will be coming in early. We should have the word out in time for the noon broadcasts on the East Coast."

"I'll have an ambulance standing by. Along with a brain specialist and neurologist. The whole thing will look like a lucky coincidence."

"After I have breakfast with Sorrel I'll alert the drivers from my phone in the Maserati."

Brenner gives him a careful smile. She folds the plan carefully, puts it in a folder. "We make a good team."

"Yes, we do."

"I'm staying in a poolside room tonight," Brenner says. "Maybe we can have dinner sent to the room."

Robertson considers her for a moment: tousled fair hair, green eyes, painted smile. He decides against it. They know too much about one another to be involved on anything but a business level.

Once upon a time, maybe, the music business had been about joy. Then it became about money. Now it was about power, power over minds, over masses. The future.

"Perhaps some other time," he says. He rises from his chair, looks at the folder sitting next to Brenner on the couch. "Gather up all the papers and

scenarios," he says. "I'll want to destroy them tomorrow."

"Good."

All the memos and diagrams have Brenner's name on them. Robertson won't destroy them; he'll keep them in a safe. One never knows when compromising documents might come in handy.

"Bye, then." He waves as he leaves, and closes the door on her smile.

vi

"We're aware of your project." This three a.m. voice is somehow familiar.

"Ah," says Robertson. "What project was that?" His wife stirs uneasily on the bed beside him.

"Your project in regard to Mr. Sorrel. We wanted you to know that we approve."

"Thank you," says Robertson cautiously. "We hope the album will be a success." Where has he heard this voice before?

"During the harsh economic times to come, with their inevitable restructuring, voices such as Mr. Sorrel's can only cause discord and division. The nation requires unity, vigor, affirmation. We hope the people will hear that positive message."

The phrase discord and division jogs Robertson's memory; he's heard it before. He realizes the voice is that of the President.

"Thank you, sir."

"Bless you, Mr. Robertson." The President — or his voice — hangs up. For a moment Robertson listens to the distant whispers and clicks of the world's communication network, then puts the phone gently on its cradle.

Was that really the President? he wonders. Or was it someone — maybe someone in Lizard Records — with a simulacrum of the President's voice?

Or was the President himself a simulacrum?

Robertson decides it doesn't matter.

He sleeps very well.

vii

"Thanks for breakfast. I hope I wasn't imposing."

"Not at all, man." Sorrel is smiling as he shrugs into his denim vest. He reaches into a pocket and takes out a pair of Ray-Bans, puts them on his nose. Velda, dressed in tennis whites, follows them out the door, a racket dangling in her hand.

"It was delicious," Robertson says. "I haven't had a shrimp omelet in years."

"Velda's recipe."

Robertson opens the door of his Maserati. He looks from his car to the bike and back. "You're heading for the studio, right?"

"Yeah."

"So am I." He gives Sorrel a grin. "Think you can beat me?"

Sorrel laughs. "The way I can weave in traffic? You crazy?"

"A hundred bucks."

Delight spreads across Sorrel's face. "Whatever you say, man. But I'll beat you by half an hour. I've been going down that canyon road every morning at a hundred and twenty clicks."

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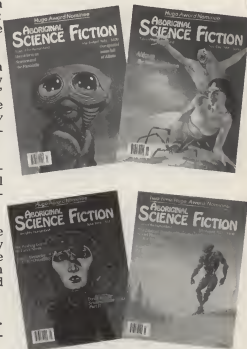
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Robertson reaches for his cellular phone. "Let me just make a call first. Let people know I'm coming."

Velda steps up to Sorrel, kisses him goodbye. "Be careful," she says. "You know how I worry."

"I can take care of myself."

viii

Brenner's cool voice came into Robertson's ear. "The PR's going out. We're the top story on all the radio networks."

"Good."

"Any news from the doctors?"

"Looks like it's not fatal."

"I'll put that on the five o'clock bulletin. That'll get us on the early evening TV news broadcasts."

"Good." Robertson clears his throat and wishes he had his atomizer. "Make sure to have that package on my desk, okay?"

"It's already there."

"Thanks. You have no idea how relieved I am at how this turned out."

ix

"I hope and trust that Sorrel will be back in the studio in a matter of weeks." Robertson gives the videocams a hesitant smile. "More than that I can't say. It's just too early."

He turns from the cameras and steps into the intensive care ward. Velda is there, sucking on one of the smokeless cigarettes they sell in the hospital gift shop. Above her, familiar-looking X-ray negatives are displayed on a light board. Two doctors are pointing with their pencils and talking.

"The left cerebral cortex shows no sign of electrical activity," says one. "The right is damaged also, but to a lesser degree." His eyes gaze firmly into Velda's from behind steel-rimmed spectacles. His voice is cool, dispassionate. He might be talking about the weather in Fresno.

The other doctor sucks on his cheeks. "We can expect, at best, only a slight recovery from Mr. Sorrel's eyes. He will only be able to see dimly, if at all. When the shards from his sunglasses went in, they created massive damage. Both eyes may still have to be removed."

Velda sucks on her cigarette. "Thank you, gentlemen," she nods.

"Be brave, Mrs. Sorrel." This from the second.

Velda nods. "I will."

After the doctors leave, Robertson takes Velda's arm and leads her away. Velda licks her lips. "They say the centers of personality and memory are gone," she says.

"He's a vegetable?"

"In the left hemisphere, anyway." Annoyance flickers across her perfect face. "He turned his head

just before the impact, damn it. All the damage was on the left side."

"Couldn't be helped. That was one of the things that we couldn't control."

"That's why his neck snapped. He'll be a quadriplegic."

"And the right hemisphere?"

"Probably okay. Most of it, anyway."

Robertson thought for a moment. "Miss Brenner has had some work done with regard to this contingency. The right hemisphere is the creative side. It's what we want, anyway."

Velda lets out a long breath. "It'll be okay, then?"

Robertson gives her an encouraging smile. "You'd be surprised what doctors can do nowadays."

X

Sorrel sits expressionlessly in his wheelchair. The right side of his face is curiously slack. Electrodes creep across his cheek, disappear beneath a bandage over his empty right eye socket. The other empty socket is covered by a black patch.

Dr. Sivitsky, round and bespectacled, crouches over his controls. "He may sound strange," he said. "He can do no more than whisper. There is no control over the right side or the right vocal cord."

Robertson's mouth waters as Velda's cigarette smoke drifts to his nostrils. He nods, starts his recorder. "Go ahead, Doctor."

Sivitsky touches a control, feeds minute stimulating currents to Sorrel's speech centers. Sorrel's mouth drops open, begins working.

"Torrent of the wind at nighttime," he says. His voice is hushed. "Catalog of the dead."

Robertson smiles, nods.

"Sun-dapples. Sheep. The drains are clogged."

"It's chance, you see," Sivitsky says. "What remains of his mind is accessing partial memories at random."

"How the world spins. Arizona can be the site of the safari. Velda's smile is very special."

Velda scowls. "Gibberish."

Robertson looks at her and smiles. "Not gibberish. Lyrics."

Velda looks at him.

"Lyrics we can choose," Robertson says. "Lyrics we can control. Lyrics that can reflect any trend, mean anything we need them to mean."

A hesitant smile begins to move across Velda's face. "It's okay, then?"

The vegetable's mouth continues to move, his whisper continuing without cease. Robertson looks at Sorrel in utter satisfaction. He thinks about the words just rolling out forever, granting power to whoever could shape them. He wonders if words rolled out of the President in the same way.

"It's better than we could have hoped," he says.

He reaches for his cellular phone to tell Brenner to get the PR rolling. Sorrel, he says, is writing again.

xi

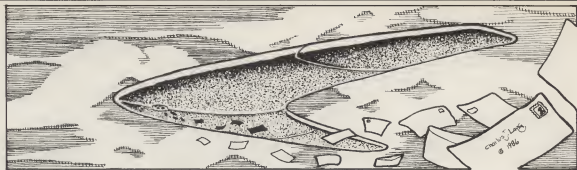
How the World Spins ships platinum.

With a bullet. □

Moving?

We expect our subscribers to move, but if you want to get your next issue of *Aboriginal*, please tell us 45 days before the next issue is due out. For instance, the next issue will be mailed about Sept. 15, so if you are moving, please tell us your new address by Aug. 1.





BOOMERANGS

Comments From Our Readers

Dear Charles,

I've enjoyed some stories in *Aboriginal SF*, but by and large, it is too much a throwback to 1950s sf. To me the ideal sf editor was Judith Merrill who was able to see such authors as Bernard Malamud ("The Jewbird") or Jose Maria Gironella ("The Red Egg") being just as suitable as Asimov or Clarke. A mix of horror, fantasy, and science fiction shows that the field is wide open to the imagination. The current fad for compartmentalization and overspecialization reveals the field as conservative and unimaginative. This is somewhat less a problem in the science fiction magazines than in anthologies, all of which seem to be narrow themes or shared-world bullshit. The magazines still attempt a range from fantasy to techy sf, though for my tastes none of it is as literate as it should be. You, however, focus on "old fashioned sci-fi" as though Doc Smith were your *raison d'être*.

Too much "humor" also reflects imaginative lack, since any fool can make the trappings of our literature look absurd and funny, but very few can shake our sense of wonder. One problem is your over-reliance on new writers, who by their lack of style, personality, or vision suggest to me that they're barely out of their teen years. You apparently love their golly-gee-whizzness, but you should also tune your ear to the flat, cartoony silliness of their dialogue and the banality of their television-fed plots and staging.

The good thing about the magazine is that it has oodles of personality, of a whimsical kind, but such whimsy should be backed by better writers, or it all begins to look like pointless clowning around.

Just my thoughts.

Thine,

Jessica Amanda Salmonson
Editor, *Fantasy Macabre*
Seattle, WA

(Dear Jessica, interesting comments, but I suspect they reflect the very compartmentalization you are

concerned about. In your case, you desire "literary" SF — which is perfectly fine. Does this mean I agree with your assessment of the nature and quality of fiction in *Aboriginal*? Of course not. We publish a mix of SF, ranging from the whimsical and humorous to the deadly serious (or "literary," if you will). I also can assure you that I have never rejected a story by Bernard Malamud or Jose Maria Gironella or (Arthur C.) Clarke or (Isaac) Asimov. Nor have I rejected stories by Norman Mailer, Mark Halprin, Salman Rushdie, Joyce Carol Oates, or H.G. Wells for that matter. They haven't submitted any. Until recently, most of the big names in the field (and outside it) figured *Aboriginal* was going to be a short-lived and relatively low-paying phenomenon and have ignored us, except for a few fine gentlemen and ladies who are mature enough and intelligent enough to know that all growing things begin as a seed, sprout into a small shoot, and grow until they flower. The rest are too busy trying to sell to the "big" markets, or sell for the "big" bucks. But I promise that no matter how "big" we become, or how "important," I, and the magazine, will keep our sense of humor and keep publishing new writers as well as any of the established writers who care to submit to us and whom we choose to publish. We will also keep a mix of 1950s SF (as you call it) with plenty of "gee-whiz" (remember that old sense-of-wonder?) along with whatever "literary" SF we like. There is a good reason for keeping our sense of humor. When I was 18, I thought humor was frivolous, what with millions starving, thousands being killed in conflicts and totalitarian jails, and millions being discriminated against for various absurd reasons. Now I know better. Humor is deadly serious. Humor is — as Robert A. Heinlein noted so well in *Stranger in a Strange Land* — what you resort to when something is too painful for any other response. So, keep laughing, Jessica, and so will I. — Ed.)

Dear Ryan:

I found Darrell's review on the *Bare-Faced Messiah* very offensive and it clashes with an otherwise good SF magazine. When I read Darrell Schweitzer's obviously slanted opinion of Mr. Hubbard in addition to his opinions of the book, I'm grossed out!

Yes I am a Scientist, but I'll tell you, I'm not fantasizing robot who hangs on his every word. I check things out and if it's true for me, then it's true. That a man is judged by his products, not by the rantings of an ex-member of any organization should be taken into account. Why are the words of an ex-member taken as truth? Would the Iranians write an honest book about the Iraqis?

I'm willing to bet your Darrell Schweitzer never read *Dianetics* nor tried its techniques. I do know these techniques eliminate stress, anxiety, and other travails of negative emotions accumulated in life because I tried them on others and observed the results. I saw the results, get it??

It's a proven fact that the Scientology organizations such as Narcanon and A.B.L.E. (Association For Better Living & Education) have made longer strides in the direction of a drug-free and intelligent generation than other groups wanting to achieve the same goals. Don't take my word for it, Ryan! Look at the statistics. Look at the numbers attesting that these programs which handle drugs, ignorance and pain are working and compare them with similar "help" groups.

To me, to slander this man (or anyone!) is inexcusable. To not give an unbiased review and account is an abuse of your First Amendment rights, in my opinion. To judge this man by his alleged actions rather than what he has produced and the potency of his policies and programs is plain ignorance on Darrell Schweitzer's part. That he gave this slanted book 5 stars (!) compounds his ignorance.

Sharpen up your journalistic talents and check out this area. Read the

books (at your library if you think I'm money hungry, too, Darrell!) and then write me or publish what you think.

Still a reader,
Jim Mourgos
San Francisco, CA

(I suspect you misunderstand the First Amendment and the function of a reviewer. The First Amendment gives everyone the right to speak. It allows all opinions to be expressed; the opinions do not need to be sanctioned or "official" versions. A reviewer provides his/her opinion and evaluation of a book. I've found in life that all expressed opinions usually elicit opinions of equal and opposite force. — Ed.)

Dear Alien Publisher:

Your comments about the postal workers make me think you have been to our Clairemont branch office. When next you visit here, and want a really good salad, prepared fresh at your table, go to the Boathouse restaurant in Pacific Beach. The waiters there know how to do it right. The rest of the food is good too. Prices are high, so I do not go often.

Lew Rishel
San Diego, CA

Dear *Aboriginal*,

... wacky-did-wonderful ... I suppose you folks can figure out the rest.

Anyway, I do not wish to clutter up your letter column with this petty bickering but I thought that I should clear the air of these harsh feelings. (Besides, I love to see my name in print.) Dear Harlan seems to have misunderstood the thrust of my argument, pointless though it may have been. The point he took up, my umbrage at the oversight of Robert Heinlein, was more brought on by the derogatory remark towards the moniker "sci-fi," the creation of which was attributed to the late Master. I don't doubt Harlan's facts, and it is true that Heinlein's work was not judged part of the New Wave, but he, of all people, should realize that fans get ornery when you slight their idols, especially when they are recently deceased. For my affront I hope that Harlan will accept my deepest apology.

By the way. You may not believe this, Harlan, but I am also a fan of yours. It's just that you're so much easier to gibe.

(Forrest J. Ackerman claims credit/blame for "sci-fi." — Ed.)

Your fan,
Robert Fleck
San Ramon, CA

Dear *Aboriginal*:

Enclosed is \$30. Please extend my subscription to issue #36.

In No. 14, you published what I think is the best conceptual short story

since "I Have No Mouth But I Must Scream" (by Harlan Ellison). "In the Shadow of Bones" (by Robert A. Metzger) was excellent — must reading for those among us who have forgotten the possibilities.

Thanks,
J.P.O'Neill
Underhill, VT

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please give note to Vivan Vande Velde and T. Serio that a shotgun is not a rifle (May-June 1989 edition, "Jim-Bob and the Alien," page 39, last paragraph on the page). A shotgun fires small pellets out of a smooth cylinder while a rifle fires a solid projectile through a cylinder with spiral grooves which impart spin to the projectile.

Sincerely,
Donald Goss
Gallatin, TN

(Many things depend on your point of view. One view might be that the shotgun (or rifle) was an alien-induced hallucination just like the snakes (if the snakes were illusionary). Of course it could be that with two authors, one prefers the shotgun for close work while the other likes the accuracy of the rifle. Or it could be that we goofed. But that's the least likely of all, isn't it? — Ed.)

Dear Sirs:

Please renew my subscription to *Aboriginal Science Fiction* for 18 issues. Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$30.00.

I have been a subscriber from the beginning and have never regretted it. I enjoy the artwork and rely on the extensive book reviews. I subscribe to two other SF mags but I sincerely enjoy *Aboriginal* the most. Keep up the excellent work!

Thanks,
Keith Murrow
Greenland, NH

Dear Mr. Ryan,
Enclosed you will find a check for 12 more issues of your terrific magazine at the full price of \$24.00.

Just a brief comment on your magazine ... I LOVE IT! Was that brief enough?

Please send me your writer's guidelines. I've enclosed the SASE. One never knows when inspiration will strike.

Keep up the good work, and thanks!

Sincerely impressed,
Luane R. Luce
Durham, NC

Dear Illegal Crazy Alien
Publisher:

I just finished reading your comments in issue No. 15. Forgive me if this letter is lacking in coherency, but I sit here in a state of stunned admiration at the astonishing accuracy of your evaluation of those sterling citizens who earn their livelihood at the expense of the rest of us. Especially in light of the KPMG Peat Marwick Main & Co. "Tax Letter" I am enclosing herewith. (Burp. Tasty, thanks. — Alien Pub.)

It seems to me that your study of the human institution known as "government," particularly as practiced in these United States, would hardly be complete without an analysis of that agency known as the Internal Revenue Service. Or, more popularly, the IRS. Employees of the Postal Service have been chartered to, as you so succinctly point out, uncover and apply the basic laws governing inaction. Their success is beyond question and their methods have been faithfully duplicated at the state and local levels (without, I might point out, any system of royalty payments to Uncle Sam — the real reason for the deplorable deficit the Federal government has run up. But I digress.)

The IRS, on the other hand, has been charged with perfecting the second (but co-equal) responsibility of government — distraction. For years they have worked at perfecting their goal, and again have achieved an admirable level of success — despite the insidious encroachment of their sister agency's proven tactics. But now the IRS has reached the ultimate level of accomplishment — THEY HAVE DISTRACTED THEMSELVES.

As Peat's "Tax Letter" describes, the IRS has developed a contingency plan in the event of nuclear war. (If you can convince Ryan to print any of this, feel free to insert the appropriate part of the "Tax Letter" here, or anywhere else, for that matter.) *(We don't condone taxes. — Alien Pub.)* Further, on this subject, deponent sayeth not.

Dazedly yours,
Rich Hauptmann
Clovis, NM

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Here it is, time to renew my subscription. Since I didn't want to cut any of my copies of *Aboriginal*, I decided to write a letter. I enjoy reading the magazine and the artwork is excellent. The stories seem to be well-written and entertaining. The columns are very good and the reviews seem to be accurate and concise.

There is room for improvement, however. Going monthly is not a bad idea. Also, I would like to see about thirty to forty more pages. Of course that means adding more advertising (the Science Fiction Book Club is a likely candidate). Make the cover thicker (it is quite fragile) and add at

(Continued to page 60)

The Portrait of Daryanree the King

By Larry Niven

Art by Pat Morrissey

It was a good game while it lasted. Jovan left the palace that night as a hunted fugitive, ruined by the mannerless sixteen-year-old daughter of a border nobleman; but at noon he had joined His Majesty's Thirty-Eighth Birthday Celebration as one of the most powerful men in Seaclaw.

The parades and games made pleasant cover for the real business of the Birthday, as two hundred local and visiting nobles set forth to meet anyone who could do them good. By sunset all was circles of private conversation; an outsider might as well go home. The guests had eaten well and drunk better. King Daryanree was monopolizing the youthful Lady Sylvara, to the discomfiture of many who coveted her attention, or his.

Jovan should have been watching them. But he had made an ill-considered remark to Raskad Mil, and the princes' brass-voiced teacher had backed him against a wall to lecture on ghosts.

Jovan was flattered but wary. Old Mil had taught literature and history to the King as well as to his sons. He was treating Jovan as an equal. That could help Jovan's own reputation, unless Mil caught the purported artist-magician in some egregious ignorance.

"I only said that I had never seen one," he protested.

Mil would have none of that. "After all, where do barbarous peoples bury their dead? The ancient battlefields become the graveyards, do they not? And so they remain centuries later. You, Jovan, you hail from a war-torn land. Of course you see no ghosts!"

A young man at Jovan's shoulder asked the question Jovan dared not. "Why would it matter, Raskad Mil? Battlefields —"

"Ancient wars were fought with magic as well as swords. The sites are exhausted of the *manna*, the magical force. Ghosts give no trouble on a battlefield. But Seaclaw's battles were all at sea, and even that was long ago. Our folk have always buried their dead on Worm's-Head Hill, with a view of land and sea to make them more comfortable."

They were superstitious, the Seaclaw folk. Jovan's smile froze on his face when peals of laughter suddenly rang through the audience hall. He'd missed something —

Conversation stopped. Lady Sylvara was easily

the loveliest woman in the hall; but she was young and fresh from the border, untrained in courtly ways. In the silence her voice was clear, musical. "Majesty, I would have thought that a man of your age would find interest in less strenuous pursuits!"

The King's fury showed only for an instant. Give him credit, King Daryanree had learned self-control at the negotiation tables. He said, "But unlike many a lovely young lady, Sylvara, I grow no older."

And Jovan was already working his way through the crowd, not hurrying, but *moving*. He barely heard Sylvara's, "Dyeing one's hair does nothing for crows' feet, Majesty —"

At the great doors Jovan nodded to the guards and passed outside. A sliver of sun still showed at the northern edge of Worm's-Head Hill. An autumn chill was setting in. While an attendant went for Jovan's cloak, another stepped into the courtyard and waved toward the line of coaches. Nothing moved. The attendant said, "Councillor, I don't see your driver."

Jovan knew about luck. Like wine: when luck turns sour, the whole barrel is sour. "Kassily probably went for a drink. Well, it's a nice night for a walk."

"We can provide you with a coachman —"

"No, I'll just go on down to the World-Turtle and send Kassily back for the coach." Jovan waited. Death for the price of a cloak? He could not leave without it. In this cold he would seem feckish.

The man returned with Jovan's cloak, and Jovan wished them both goodnight and strolled off into the growing dark.

Now what?

In any place that knew him, the King's men could find him. The King would be wanting explanations! Jovan had known that this might come. For eight years he had postponed his departure. The King might die, some fool might steal the painting for his powers; at worst he could be clear before the King's hairline began to recede; and meanwhile his wealth accumulated in Rynildissen.

Jovan turned left toward the World-Turtle, toward the sea, toward Seaclaw's ancient hill of the dead.

He dared not go home. He had not married; he had not left hostages for the king to take. His house and lands would be confiscated, of course, and the excellent painting of Jovan himself as a decrepit octogenarian....



But there was money to keep him comfortable for the rest of his life if he could reach Rynildissen. He could buy passage on a ship, if he could reach the docks. Had he enough coins? Never mind; he wore rings; that was what rings were for. He would sell the silver buckles on his shoes if he need be.

He passed the tavern, walking faster now. He'd painted that sign himself: the turtle whose shell was the world, afloat in a sea of stars. Real stars were emerging, and the World-Turtle was noisy and bright with candlelight. *Kassily, we've both lost our professions tonight, but you at least will keep your life.*

There were no houses beyond the World-Turtle, and Jovan felt free to run. He had a good view of the castle. Something was happening there. Mounted men galloping down the torchlit drive? But horses wouldn't come here, nor would the Seaclaw folk. He was passing graves already, though nothing marked them but bare rounded earth or thicker grass: the graves of those who could not afford better.

Jovan was panting now. He passed white stones set upright, with marks chiseled into them. Higher up the stones had been hacked into rectangular shape. He could see small buildings, crypts, a miniature city of the dead lined along the crest of Worm's-Head Hill. Already he was wading through thickening mist. The night fog might help him.

Hide in a crypt? A man could go hungry for a few days. It might do him good; he had fed too well, perhaps, these eight years. Water would be a problem, but this was wet country. There would be dew to collect in the morning.

The crypt he was passing was shoulder-high, built of stone with a stone door barred on the *outside*. The next was like it. Children's tales spoke of a time when ghosts were deadly dangerous. He could get in!

A miniature castle loomed to his right: the royal crypt, centuries old, with (reputedly) plenty of room left for future generations. No guard would enter there. Jovan circled, making for the great stone door that faced the harbor. The fog was thick, waist-high; it rippled as he moved.

Clothes would be a problem. He could hardly walk the docks while dressed for a ball! But his cloak would hide him long enough.

He had begun to think past the next hour of life. That was all to the good. He slowed to a walk, and a grin began to form as he pictured King Daryanee dancing with fury. None would dare go near; how would they get their orders? Would the Guard even know what they were hunting?

Just before the door, the fog rose up and faced him.

Elsewhere the mist was rising to take other shapes, but Jovan didn't turn his head. This before him was enough: a burly man with a ravaged, eyeless face, six inches broader of shoulder than Jovan and a head taller, wearing the crown of Seaclaw. He leaned on the haft of a two-handed war-axe. The skin of the right arm flapped loose; it had been flayed away nearly to the shoulder. The left hand looked soft, with every bone broken. Loops of ... what might have been sausage hung below his torso-armor.

The ghost spoke in a voice that seemed to come

from miles away. "I know you. Samal! Usurper! I would kill you slowly, but to what point? Time enough to torment you in the ages after you're *dead*," it shrieked, and the war-axe moved with supernatural speed.

Somehow, Jovan hadn't thought of moving.

The axe swung down, split him from crown to crotch and drove deep into the dirt. Jovan felt no sensation at all. The old King stared, aghast. He swung from the side, a blow that would have severed Jovan at the waist. Then he howled and hurled the axe away.

The axe was a wisp of mist. The King, turning toward the crypt, lost shape and became a whorl in the waist-high fog. And a voice behind Jovan said, "He's mad, of course."

"Is he." Jovan turned.

Ghosts formed an arc around him. They watched him solemnly, like the audience that often formed to watch him paint. Some were only an unevenness in the mist layer, mere suggestions of human shape. Others showed detail: men and women ravaged by disease or age; the heads of children just showing above the mist; a burly man who hung back from the crowd, whose rope-burned neck hung askew and whose fingertips dripped big droplets of fog.

The nearest had the shape of a lean old man with pointed nose and chin, bald scalp, a fringe of long hair blurred at the ends: a very clear, precise image. That apparition said, "Zale the Tenth was tortured to death. He lasted ten days. It would have driven anyone mad."

Jovan got his own throat working, largely to see if he could do it. Could he get the ghosts talking? "I take it you got off easier."

"I think not. The plague is an easier death, but it took my family. Will you be here long?"

"A few days."

"Good. We'd like the company, and we won't harm you. Can't."

"The *manna* level's worn too low." Jovan sighed, perhaps in relief; he wasn't sure himself. "Over most of the world ghosts have no power at all. You've the first I've ever seen."

A child's voice asked, "Are you a magician? You talk like one."

"I am," Jovan said.

The old man's ghost drifted toward him. Jovan held himself from flinching at its immaterial touch. The ghost reached into Jovan's chest. Jovan thought he felt old fingers wrapped around his heart. The ghost grinned (the teeth were missing all down the right side, and scarce on the left) and said, "You're not."

"Why not?"

"A magician keeps some of the magic that passes through him. A touch of *manna* makes a ghost stronger. You don't have any. We all know about *manna* here, but how did you find out?"

Jovan sat down on a headstone. "The old woman who taught me to paint, *she* was a magician. She'd given it up long before I met her, when all the spells gradually stopped working. But Lanearda made her magic by painting. You know, paint a successful hunt, put hairs of the animal and the hunter in the paint. Or

paint your side winning a battle —”

A distant scream caused Jovan to jump. The scream of a horse? Two horses in chorus, down at the foot of the hill.

The spectre didn't appear to have noticed. "Hunters still did that when I was a young man," it said. "So you're a painter. Why did you say you were a magician?"

Jovan wore a guilty grin. "Well, the King thinks so."

"So?"

"Maybe he doesn't by now. But he did, for eight years. I came to Seaclaw just four days ahead of the King's thirtieth birthday. I got into the celebration at the palace by painting my landlady's daughter and bringing it as a present.

"King Daryanree wanted a few words with me. He wanted to meet the girl. She wasn't as pretty as I painted her. But I mentioned my teacher Laneerda, and Daryanree knew the name. Legend has her a lot more powerful than she ever was! We talked some more, and I saw how much Daryanree hated the idea of getting old. So I told him I could keep it from happening."

"That sounds dangerous," the ghost pointed out. "Not to mention dishonest."

"But they did it that way! Paint a portrait, put hair and fingernail clippings and blood and urine from the subject in the paint. Do it right, the painting grows old instead of the subject. Of course you have to guard the painting, because if that gets hurt ... but the better the painting is, the better the spell works. It's not my fault if the magic isn't good any more. *I'm good.*"

"Why didn't you just take the money and run?"

It was strange to be talking to a ring of ghosts as if they were any normal audience. Strange, and oddly pleasant, to finally speak his secret where it could not harm him. "Daryanree isn't a complete fool. He offered me a house and an annual fee. I couldn't see any way to turn that down without making him suspicious, and it was good money. So I told him it was just as well, because the painting would have to be tended — even Daryanree knows that *mana* fades with time — and when I told him about the old spell I added some details.

"I painted him naked, and I made him shave so more of his face would show in the painting, otherwise he'd get old under the whiskers. He wouldn't shave his head. He did agree to keep his face shaved for the rest of his life. It started a court fashion. I made him up a fluid to rinse his hair every few days, to maintain an affinity with the paint —"

"He'll still get old," the ghost protested. "Only the dead don't get old."

"Well, but I had him washing his hair in dark dye, and there's no gray in his beard because he shaves it off, and maybe he's getting wrinkled, but who's going to tell him? Nobody says that to the King! As for the painting, I insisted on absolute privacy while I renewed the spells. Trust me, the King's painting did grow older!

"I did some good, too. Daryanree was due to execute a bunch of farmers for not paying their taxes. The hands in the painting showed bloody. I told the King, made him come see. He freed the farmers. When he was ready to declare war on Rynildissen, the painting sprouted a dripping red line across the neck, and his crown and robes turned transparent. That took



Now that we've captured their king, I suspect they'll give up without a fight.

J. Workman

days. I had to paint it in my house and smuggle it in. But the King signed a peace treaty, and he made me a Councillor.

"Then this afternoon the King made an advance to the wrong girl. Right about now he's staring into a mirror and wondering how he could have been so gullible."

"And you came here."

"I thought I'd be safe. I didn't really believe in ghosts. I was sure they couldn't harm me."

"And now?"

The murmuring around Jovan didn't sound entirely friendly. Nonetheless Jovan said, "It's still the way to bet."

"Do you believe in a finding-stone?"

"Mmm? For finding a man? Well, it would be magic, of course. It wouldn't work except in a few places ... Why?"

The elderly ghost said, "I was second in command of Zale the Tenth's forces when I was alive. A lot of us joined the usurper, and that way a lot of blood wasn't spilled, but the plague that followed ... maybe we brought that on us too. Samal's veins carried no more than a jigger of royal blood. But the Guard had a finding-stone spelled by the wizard Clubfoot himself. We still have it, even if it's lost some of its power."

Jovan felt a numbing fear flowing through his body. "Will they dare come here?"

A voice cleared its throat and said, "I did." It was clearly human and very close.

Jovan didn't turn. A clean swing of a sword through his neck? When the luck turns sour — "Companion of dogs," Jovan said to the old man's ghost. "You kept me here. You made me talk. You're dead! You're not an officer any more, you didn't have to — I didn't do any real harm —"

Something massive moved through the ring of ghosts, and their bodies swirled and steadied as it passed. Jovan stood up to face a man of the King's Guard.

Daryanee chose his guards partly for their appearance. The man was tall; he fitted his armor well. He carried a well-polished, well-honed sword in one hand and what might have been a large volcanic-glass arrowhead in the open palm of the other.

But he was alone. No horse would walk among ghosts and no companion had followed, and he must be half out of his mind with fear. Jovan could smell chilled fear-sweat. And Jovan cried piteously, "I can't move! They've got me, but it's not too late for you. Run!"

There was a tremor in the burly guard's voice. "These spectres are my own people, barbarian! I heard what you said. The King wants to talk to you. Will you come quietly?"

A king cannot afford to look the fool. Jovan knew too much to live. He said, "Yes! Yes, if you can pull me loose from this." He let his eyes roll; he stretched his arms toward the guard; he writhed on the headstone, then sagged in defeat.

"Liar!" the guard roared. He moved forward as if through glue. Jovan waited to see if the guard would break.

The mist surged up, and Zale the Tenth stood be-

fore the guard. The skin of his arm flapped as he moved. Massive, flayed and blind and tormented, the old king's ghost was a horrid sight. "I know you," it cried. "Samal! Usurper!" The war-axe rose and fell.

The guard tried to block. The axe wafted through his sword and smashed his naked shield-arm back across his chest. The guard reeled backward and smacked against the rough stone of a crypt.

Jovan shook his head.

The guard didn't move. And the fog had clumped above him, nearly hiding him. Ghosts surrounded the man like jackals feeding. Jovan remembered other legends, of vampires —

He forced himself to move among them, through them, feeling resistance and chill. He unlaced the guard's leather torso armor and pulled it off and placed his palm on the man's chest.

"His heart's still beating. I don't understand," the artist said, and sudden claustrophobic terror took him. He could see nothing; he was embedded in ghosts.

The finding-stone was shattered in the guard's hand. The magic in it could have made Zale's axe real enough to hurt, real enough to send a man flying backward. But there was no blood, no break in the armor or the tunic beneath or, when Jovan carefully pulled the tunic off, in the skin either. Not real enough to cut, then. A bruise was forming above the sternum, but Jovan found no broken ribs.

"He must have bumped his head," Jovan mumbled. He found blood on the back of the man's scalp, but no splintered softness beneath. "He'll wake soon. I've got to get moving. They think the stone will find me. They won't look for me at the docks —"

"They'll look," said the old Guard officer's voice.

Jovan stripped hurriedly. The touch of the ghosts was cold, and they clustered close. He donned the guard's clothing as rapidly as he could. The boots were roomy; he tore up his own shirt to pad them. His rings he took off and put in the toes. His cloak wouldn't fit the look of the uniform. He spread it over the guard.

He strode out of the mist of ghosts. The fog ran away from him downhill, to form a pale carpet over the harbor and the sea. The lighthouse on Seaclaw Point showed above. Jovan took it as his target.

The dead general took shape, striding alongside him, clutching something. It said briskly, "They'll look. I'll follow you and point you out."

Jovan stopped. He said, "You can't leave Worm's-Head Hill. You never could before and you can't now."

"Do you believe that?"

When the luck turns sour ... but his luck had saved him from the guard! Push it, then. With the broken finding-stone to give them life, ghosts could harm him now. The way to bet —

"I didn't believe it when I said it," Jovan laughed. He snatched at the ghost's clenched fist. The bones of his hand passed with a grating sensation through other bones, and tore away two shards of black glass, two pieces of the broken finding-stone.

Jovan flung them far into the dark. The ghost ran after them. Jovan ran the other way, downhill toward the light. □



Protecting Your Writes

"Chance favours only the prepared mind."

—Louis Pasteur (1822-1895)



FADE IN:

Plagiarism is rife in Hollywood. The art of "borrowing" ideas is so prevalent that high-powered lawyers are necessary weaponry in a creator's arsenal. Not even that lovable little alien, *E.T.*, has escaped the clutches of the copycats: in a recent issue of *Los Angeles* magazine it was reported that five lawsuits have already been filed against the producers of *E.T.* Two are from writer Lisa Litchfield, who thought that the film was based on her play, *Lokey from Maldemar*, about two aliens who visit Earth, have a series of adventures, then return home (one suit was dismissed, the other is pending). Another was from a San Francisco writer who claimed that Steven Spielberg had stolen his idea about a frog with a glowing heart. Case was dismissed. The fourth lawsuit was from a man who was upset that they used his initials. And fifth, John Williams was sued for copying notes from a song called "Joy" written by Les Baxter (Williams played with Baxter in the 1950s). In that case the jury ruled that the notes were commonplace so they could not be protected.

E.T. is not an isolated case. Still being fought out in court today is a \$45 million lawsuit involving two writers, Barry Taff and Kenneth Stoller, who claim that Christopher Reeve, Warner Bros., and the Cannon Group used their movie treatment, "Superman: The Confrontation," as a basis for *Superman IV*. Whether Taff and Stoller prevail is now a court decision. (Not all cases are legitimate. Where the awards can total thou-

sands of dollars, there are some vampires of the industry who deliberately initiate "nuisance suits" for the chance of a quick monetary settlement.)

The question remains: how can writers protect their work?

The distribution of energy for writing a movie or teleplay is 30 percent creation and 70 percent *the business of writing*. It's that 70 percent that eventually separates the professional from the amateur. In the practical sense, a writer needs to be familiar with such terms as implied contracts, the minimum basic agreement, signatories, work-for-hire contracts (fondly known as "sign this and we'll take your firstborn"): in other words, *the business of writing*. In an industry run by conglomerates, where the object is to make money, no one is going to look after a writer's rights except the writer.

For anyone who wants to write for film and television, there are simple and common-sense rules which can reduce the risk of your ideas being appropriated and increase your chance of selling:

1. The first hurdle to understand is that under current law, ideas *cannot* be protected. In the early stages of creation the best protection is secrecy, at least until the facts have been documented. The adage, "the walls have ears," isn't far from the truth.

2. Know the script format. Studios will not look at a script that's not professionally set out. With the increased popularity of publishing scripts, there is no excuse for not knowing the layout of a script.

3. One of the most important

things you *can* do is register your script with the Writers Guild of America. Open to non-members, it provides "authorship of the literary material involved and the date of its completion" for TV, film, and radio scripts. It does not mean automatic protection in court, but it does give you a record of the script's completion date, and that completion date may be useful in any potential litigation.

To register your script you can mail one unbound copy to:

Writers Guild
Registration Service
8955 Beverly Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90048.

The fee for this service is \$5.00 for members of the Writers Guild and \$10.00 for non-members (the fee must accompany the material).

To register in person, the address is:

9009 Beverly Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90048.

Monday-Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The registered script will be given a registration number and be kept on file for five years. You can renew the registration after five years. For more details you can call (213) 205-2500.

4. If you do submit a script to a studio or network, the ideal way is through an agent; it gives the writer the power of legitimacy. Idea thieves are less inclined to steal if the writer and material have the backing of an agent. You'll also find that most television shows only accept submissions through an agent. One out of the 93 shows listed in the March *Writers Guild TV Market Place* accepted blind submissions (submissions

without agents). If you don't have an agent, you've instantly reduced your market by 92 shows. The statistics from the recent *Twilight Zone* corroborate the necessity of an agent: of the 3,000 blind submissions sent to the TZ offices, all of which were read, one was bought! (On the subject of agents, there's one cardinal rule: a film or TV agent should be based in Los Angeles — no exceptions. The same reasoning goes for literary agents; they should be based in New York — no exceptions.)

5. Before you submit your script, find out:

a. who has the power to buy. If you give your script to a friend of a friend of a friend of the props department, then it deserves to be stolen.

b. what is currently in production. By the time you see *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on your screens, most, if not all, of the scripts have been committed for the current season. In the case of film, you have to be original. If you want to sell a script, don't write your version of a great film that's just come out. On average, a film takes two years to produce, so by the time you see the film you want to emulate, the studios are already two years ahead of you in their thinking. The film you're seeing is already old news.

6. Keep a daily log of who, what, when, why, and where. Whom you talked to, what you talked about, the date of the meeting or conversation, the name of the studio. In the case of a dispute you'll have the documentation to prove that you spoke to Mr. X at Sleazy Studios on April 23rd about *Cannibal Zombies from Mars*. The outcome of a plagiarism lawsuit hinges on three factors: originality, "access," and "similarity." With documentation such as a log, you're a step nearer to proving access.

7. Never, under pain of death, send a script or story to an author. It will not be read. Protection is a two-headed coin: not only does the creator need to be protected, but the recipients of the material need protection, whether they're studios or authors. If you sent an author a synopsis of a screenplay you were working on and that author just

happened to be working on a similar idea and then sold the idea, how many of you would honestly believe that the author hadn't stolen the idea from you? Sending a screenplay or a story to an author marks you as an amateur.

8. Don't send out the last copy of your script. It has numerous chances of getting lost between you and the studio.

9. If you don't know the answers, find someone who does.

These are just general guidelines to help potential writers from creation to submission. I haven't covered problems such as finding the right agent, pitching, copyright, signatories, residuals, or the thousand and one things you should know but nobody tells you until they yell, "Surprise!" The above pointers are intended to help stop basic mistakes before they're made.

If you're still perverse enough to put pica to paper, and want to learn more about the business of writing, then there are several books that can help answer your questions about screenwriting:

The Writer's Legal and Business Guide. Compiled by the Beverly Hills Bar Association Barristers Committee for the Arts, it covers the business and legal aspects of writing for film, TV, and books, and includes detailed sec-

tions on agents (how to get one), taxes, submitting a script, copyright information, and contract law. *The Guide* is available from the Committee for the Arts, Beverly Hills Bar Association Barristers, 300 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212. (213) 553-6644. Price \$12.00. (The Bar Association also holds an annual writers' symposium on the business of writing.)

The Complete Book of Script Writing by J. Michael Straczynski. Published by Writer's Digest Books.

Literary Market Place (LMP). Published by R. R. Bowker. It lists every American book publisher with its name, address, phone number, key personnel, and branch offices. The list also includes PR services, newspapers, book manufacturers, and radio, TV, and cable networks. Check out your local library for this one.

The Community of the Book. Published by the Library of Congress and compiled by Carren O. Kaston. It lists organizations devoted to the promotion of books. □

F ADE OUT:

For expert help, thanks to: The Beverly Hills Bar Association, Greg Victoroff, Esq., and "destroyer lawyer" Henry Holmes.

Moon

By John B. Rosenman

*Earth tumor,
were you cut
from her warm breast eons past
by a cosmic scalpel
and laid on the black felt
of infinite space
to glow like a cold white jewel?*

*Cratered by a million asteroids
and bound by a magic
scientists call gravity,
do you ever miss the green flesh
spinning above,
spinning below,
forever beyond you?* □



Flamirz 88

Sing a Song of Porkchops

By Thomas A. Easton

Art by Larry Blamire

Tommy knew what the "pig" was: it was precisely what it had been in the Mechanical Age of the century before: a greedy devourer of scraps and leavings that sat beneath the kitchen sink. It was, in short, a garbage disposal. Engineered from its rural eponym, it survived on whatever nutriment it could extract from whatever Tommy's mother Petra flushed down the drain.

This much he had known from the time he could crawl, for small children explore every cupboard within their reach. But he was six before he truly discovered the pig. Only then did he crawl into the dark, odorous space beneath the kitchen sink and close the door behind him.

He would have been at school, except that the engineers had not yet cured the common cold. His nose was running. He had a fever. His eyes hurt. And the dark was welcome balm.

He sniffed as he curled his body around the warm bulk of the garbage disposal. His hand stroked the short bristles of its hide, exploring its contours. Small hooves jutted from the barrel-like body, the limbs themselves reduced to vestigial stumps. It had no neck, its head rising from the shoulders, the mouth and throat aimed permanently upward to meet the sink's drainpipe, its breath whuffling against the underside of the metal basin. It rested on broad haunches, plugged into a second pipe in the floor of the cabinet, fulfilling its intended function as an intermediate link in the plumbing.

Tommy sniffed again. He murmured self-pityingly, "I'm sick."

A soft, gurgling grunt answered him. To him, it sounded rather like the sympathy he craved, which his mother, busy in another room, was not providing in sufficient quantity. He smiled, hugged the garbage disposal as best he could with his short arms, and added, "I hurt, too."

The gurgling resolved itself into nasal words: "At least you don't have these goddamned pipes shoved up your ass and down your throat."

Tommy drew back. "You're not s'posed to talk like that!"

"Hell, I'm not supposed to talk at all. Those ... those engineers were supposed to make my brain as rudimentary as my legs, but somebody had to get cute. Probably thought it made a good joke."

Tommy didn't understand all the words, but the

music was clear. The garbage disposal wasn't happy either. He patted its shoulder in the dark. "How come you can talk?"

"Some smart-ass made me that way. And I picked up a lot waiting around in the warehouse, and then some more sitting right here. You'd be surprised what I've heard. Maybe I'll even tell you, someday. If I don't get outta here first."

The boy tried to imagine being a engineered pig, plugged into the plumbing under a sink. "The pipe ..."

"You betcha. But they put my teeth and tongue way back in my throat, so I can chew the ... Shhh." It fell silent as footsteps sounded on the floor outside the cupboard.

"Tommy? Where are you?" With a sniffing sigh, Tommy pushed the cupboard door open. "What are you doing in *there*? Oh! You need to blow your nose. And ..."

Somehow, Tommy knew better than to tell his mother that the garbage disposal could talk. Quietly, he let himself be tucked back into the blankets on the living-room couch, in front of the *veedo*.

But he did not forget. Over the months that followed, the pig became Tommy's friend and refuge. Whenever he was lonely or sad, whenever he wanted someone to talk with — and whenever his parents were not in the kitchen — he would crawl into the dark space to luxuriate in the friendly, warm odor, to hug and pet the garbage disposal, and to talk. And he learned. His new friend used dozens of words he had never heard before, and many which he somehow felt he had best not repeat, except when he was playing with his next-door friend Jimmy. Among them were "mech" and its derivatives, which the boy would one day realize echoed the Mechanical Age of the not-so-distant past.

His new friend had a novel viewpoint as well, that of a prisoner, or a slave, a possession that must not speak up or out. It spoke only for Tommy, and occasionally it would wish its life were otherwise: "If I had decent legs," it would say, wiggling its stubs. "If only I had decent legs! I'd be gone. Free!"

"And then what?" Tommy would ask.

"I'd find me a girl, and someplace without any pipes, and"

Tommy named the pig after a character in a dusty

library book. And when he could, he gave Freddy treats — a piece of candy dropped discreetly down the sink drain; a pie plant fruit that was not, for a change, overripe; choice bits of porkchop or steak buried in the scraps of his meals.

Inevitably, his mother noticed. But she did not stop him. He found out why one evening when, lying wakeful in his bed, he heard her laugh. Quietly, he slipped from between his covers and tiptoed to the hall just outside the living room. Petra was saying, "He's so cute! But I'm afraid he'll get it so fat we'll have to replace it."

His father grunted, rather like Freddy. "Not likely. It's engineered to absorb only what it needs. Turns almost everything else into gas and heat. Guaranteed not to grow."

"You should know, Ralphie." Her husband's job was purchasing bioplances for a large department store in the nearby city. He had told her once that the pig was the engineers' only successful attempt to reduce pollution at the source. They had tried to market a living toilet, but that effort had fallen flat. People had insisted on calling it a "grin."

"But do you think we should get him a pet?" she added. "Maybe a dog?"

Tommy didn't hear the rest, for one of them turned up the volume on the *veedo* set. When no one said anything about a pet the next day, he was just as glad. He had Freddy, and he didn't need any other animal, especially not one that couldn't talk. And Freddy was not an "it," not anymore.

One Saturday evening, not long after his fifteenth birthday, Tommy was alone in the house. His parents had gone to a show, and he was standing in front of the bathroom mirror. He was, in the way of teen-agers, making faces at himself while picking at a pimple.

He was also in psychological agony. He had just lost his girl. He had made the mistake of telling her about Freddy, thinking that she might like to meet a talking garbage disposal, and she had called him "weird." She had said *normal* people didn't socialize with their appliances. She had wondered out loud what he *did* with his pig. And she had told him, just to rub it in, that she would let Solly McGee take her to the roachster races that night.

Tommy wondered what she was telling Solly now, but only for a moment. He wiggled his eyebrows at his mirror image. He flared his nostrils. He wasn't ugly. Was he weird, *really*? *Anybody* would think Freddy was neat. Jimmy certainly did — he had told his friend years before.

The only thing about himself that he would admit was weird was his voice. It had begun to change three years before and, though he had loved to sing, he had given up in despair. He hadn't dared a note in ages. But

He looked himself in the eye. What should he try to sing? Something simple, for starters. He opened his mouth, and he began: "Jingle bells, jingle...."

His mouth closed with a snap. Was that his voice? So rich, so resonant?

He tried again: "Happy birthday to me, Happy" The result was the same. His voice had finished changing, at last, at long last!

The bathroom door slammed as he charged into the kitchen. "Hey, Freddy! Listen to this!"

He slung open the door to the cupboard under the sink, thrust in his head — there was no longer room for more — and began to sing "Clementine." A gurgling protest — "You're bloody deafening me!" — promptly shut him off, but only until he could extricate the pig from the plumbing.

"Ouch! Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" The pig's voice echoed up the drain and in the kitchen. "Stop pulling, dammit. Give me a chance, will you? Let me squinch down a bit." His torso contracted and bent, and suddenly his head was free. "Now, pull." Tommy pulled, and the pig emerged from his dark recess into the middle of the kitchen floor, leaving behind a pair of stubby pipes and a brief gust of pungency.

The pig peered nearsightedly around the sun-bright kitchen; the engineers hadn't thought he would ever need decent vision. "I've been stuck in there for years, and it's goddamned good to be able to stretch." His feet twitched and his barrel-like body writhed on the floor. He didn't look like he was stretching. "Sort of. But now, let's hear it."

Finally, Freddy said, "Marvelous. Marvelous. But do you know 'Kafoozalum'?"

Tommy didn't, but he learned quickly — even the six verses no songbook ever publishes — and for the next two hours, until it was almost time for his parents to get home, he and the pig sat side by side on the floor, singing their hearts out, the boy's new tenor blending miraculously with the garbage disposal's raspy bass. In the process, Tommy learned a dozen other bawdy ballads as well. He also learned to appreciate the warehouse staff who had taught Freddy so much.

"Tommy," said Freddy, his voice echoing from the sink drain. "It's time to get out of here."

Tommy was almost seventeen. A shock of hair as black as his mother's fell forward to cover the few scattered acne scars on his forehead. A head taller than any of his classmates, he could look down on both his parents. He stared into the sink, wondering what his oldest friend, his best friend, for all that he was a pig, had in mind.

"I've had enough of this cupboard," said Freddy. "And you don't belong here either. So c'mon, stop farting around and get me out of here."

"What do you mean?" But the pig was silent until Tommy had drawn him from the cramped space beneath the sink. Then he said: "Into the bathroom."

The boy obliged, tucking Freddy under one arm and carrying him into the indicated room. "Set me in the sink, and look in the mirror."

Tommy did as he was told. "So now what?" "Look at yourself. Jesus! Is this porcelain is cold!" The pig squirmed in the sink basin. In a moment, he continued. "You know, I've been here ever since your folks moved in. Even before you were born."

"So?" said Tommy. He had no idea what the pig was trying to say.

"Damn! I don't know how to say this." He hesitated, then he blurted it out: "Tommy, Ralph isn't really your daddy."

Tommy stared at himself in the mirror. "What do you mean?"

"Your mother had a thing for the guy who lived next door before Jimmy's family moved in. I heard her talking to herself lots of times. And then he moved out, but just before that ... I don't know the details."

"Maybe I should ask her."

"Yeah, but not when Ralphie's around."

For an hour after returning the pig to his place, Tommy stared at the bathroom mirror, trying — and failing — to see some trace of Ralph in his features. He could see his mother in his hair, in the narrowness of his nose, in the slant of a cheekbone, even in the shape of an earlobe. But his "father"? Already he was putting quotes around the word!

When his mother came home, he said, "Mom."

There was something in his voice and face that made Petra stop putting away the groceries she had brought home. "Tommy! What's the matter?"

"Mom." He hesitated. At last, he blurted it out:

"Mom, is Ralph really my father?"

She opened her mouth. She closed it. She raised a hand as if to touch his face. She turned back to the kitchen counter, picked up a package of frozen sucotash, and slammed it down. "No!"

More calmly, she turned back to her son. "He doesn't know. I never told him. But" She sighed. "I had an awful crush on Jack, but I thought" She rushed on, as if glad to tell the tale at last. "I was visiting"

When she finally fell silent, Tommy blindly reached out to his mother. She embraced him, and he said, "I wish I could meet him."

Petra shook her head against his chest. "He moved away. I don't know where."

"You're making a big mistake," said Jimmy. "You really ought to say good-bye to them." The boys were alone in the house on that last morning of Tommy's childhood. Ralph, as usual, was at work. Petra had gone shopping.

"He's not my father," said Tommy, throwing the last of his clothes into the small suitcase. "The hell with him. And Freddy'll never be free if I don't go now." He was uncomfortably aware that if Freddy had not spilled the beans about his parentage, the pig would have stayed a slave forever. Then, too, if he did not feel some of the injustice of Freddy's servitude ... It had taken both to drive him to this secret departure.

"He's been just like one all your life. And what about your mother?"

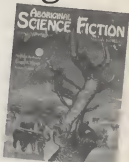
Tommy hesitated, staring down. "She'll understand," he finally said. "I think."

"I'll tell her."

"Yeah, you do that." He closed and latched the suitcase. "Tell her I'll be back someday." He paused.

We're running out

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"Maybe even in time for school in the fall." And maybe not.

"Yeah." Jimmy followed his friend into the kitchen. Together, they looked around, as if seeing it for the last time. Finally, Tommy opened the door to the cabinet under the sink. "Hey, Freddy. You coming?"

"You betcha!" came the gurgling reply. "I can hardly wait! How long do you think it'll take to find me a girl?"

"Oh, shaddap. That's not the point."

Freddy rolled an eye in Tommy's direction as the boy helped him get free of the plumbing. "You wouldn't say that if you had blue balls like I got blue balls! You wouldn't believe how long it's been since"

Jimmy laughed. "I don't know what he'd hold on with."

"Try me!"

Tommy snorted and picked Freddy up under one arm. Jimmy kicked the cabinet door shut.

Outside, Tommy set Freddy in a handcart. He wedged the suitcase in beside the creature, evoking an "Ouch! Goddammit, look out for my mechin' toes!"

"Can it, porkchop, or I won't even try to find you a girlfriend. I'll just have you for lunch." He finished bracing the pig against the jostling to come and, turning his back on the house he was leaving, picked up the cart's handle.

"Uh, good-bye," said Jimmy. He laid a hand on his friend's shoulder.

Tommy turned his face to stare at the other. He set the cart down again. "Yeah. I'll be seein' you." He wiped at his eyes with a shirt sleeve, and when Jimmy reached for him with his other hand as well, he surrendered to the hug.

Finally, he lifted the cart's handle once more. Resolutely refusing to look back at house or friend, perhaps afraid that he might change his mind, he trundled his luggage and his liberated pig onto the path beside the greenway.

Tommy was not used to the city. He had been there before, of course, but always with his parents. Never had he stood alone, staring at the line where the greenway of the residential countryside gave way to the hard pavement of commerce and industry.

He raised his eyes to the scene ahead of him. Stone and concrete, glass and steel, the buildings towered. Bioform vehicles — roachsters, medusas, horses, turtles — thronged on the streets and in the air. There were even strange things that resembled Freddy, but with longer limbs and scoop-shaped mouths. They scuttled along the roadway, gathering up the droppings of other creatures.

Intimidated by the crowds of people, dazzled by city lights, stunned by the stench and roars of a million creatures, Tommy shuddered. Freddy tilted his head to look up at his friend. "You want to go back?"

The boy shook his head and took a deep breath. "We'll get used to it." He wiped his palms against his thighs and leaned into his load. They began to move toward the chaos that loomed over them like a wave.

The first clue that something was wrong was obvious to the city's dwellers, but not to Tommy: the streets he followed were as wide as ever, and as busy with people, but the bioform vehicles had turned scarce, and the scoop-mouthed garbage-eaters he had heard someone call litterbugs were no longer in evidence at all. And then the aroma of roasting meat reminded him that he had had nothing since breakfast except two pie-plant fruits. Eagerly, he followed his nose down a side street and around a corner.

Before him was a wide square. To one side, a platform held a small but loud band. In the center of the square, a column of smoke, the obvious source of the odor that had enticed him there, rose into the late afternoon air. Filling the space between him and it was a seething mass of people, most of them young, all of them clad in dark blue coveralls.

The square's atmosphere was that of a carnival. Isolated groups gyrated to the music. Individuals bore slabs of bread draped with slices of meat and dripping with reddish-brown sauce. Voices surged like surf.

Freddy aimed his snout toward Tommy and said, as quietly as he could and still be heard, "I think we'd better get out of here."

Tommy ignored him. He stared at the scene before him, wondering how to get close to the fire and claim one of those sandwiches.

The music stopped. A tall figure in an orange overall stepped onto the platform and chanted into the mike, "Fry 'em! Roast 'em! Boil 'em! EAT the corruptions of life! Machines, not genes!"

Tommy craned his neck and saw that the carcass spit over the fire had a distinctive shovel-like jaw. He began to understand, as from the mob arose a cry of "MECH AGE! MECH AGE!" And then someone screeched, "Fresh meat!"

Tommy turned toward the latest voice. The man was pointing at him, or rather at his handcart, at Freddy. Saliva fell from the corner of his mouth toward an emblem on the breast of his dirty overall.

Tommy thought the emblem was a cogwheel, but he didn't wait to make sure. Suddenly, as the man lunged for Freddy, he found himself agreeing with the pig's latest words. He smashed the cart into the stranger's knees, spun it around, and ran. The crowd — or a part of it — was right behind him. He dashed out of the square, back down the street he had come by. Ahead, he glimpsed a door, ajar between two posters advertising "DRINKS! SEE THE SPIDER LADY! DINNER!" There was a space for a holographic display, too, though the hologram itself was turned off.

It was dark behind the door, but Tommy didn't hesitate. He thrust himself and his cart through the opening, stopped, and spun to slam the door shut and fumble for a lock.

His pursuers were already pushing at the door outside. Tommy strained to keep the door shut, almost crying at his inability to find a button, a key, anything!

Something — someone — added weight to his own, and the door settled into its jamb. A hand rose above his head, and something clicked. "There," said a

voice. "You're safe. Follow me."

The light was too dim to see much, but Tommy could make out a man of middle height dressed in a white shirt and black suspenders. Behind him, in a ceramic tub, was a goldfish bush, its ripely twitching fruit glowing with color.

Obediently, he followed the man, pushing the cart before him into a large room. The light here was better, though still dim, and he recognized a bar, a stage, a clear area that must be for dancing, and the ranks of tables and chairs that defined a restaurant in this age as in any other.

The other turned and revealed himself as thin, balding, mustached, and smiling. "Welcome to The Spider's Web. I'm Cal, bartender and manager."

Tommy swallowed. "I'm"

Cal laughed. "You're new in town. I can see that. Or you'd have known enough to keep your pig away from those Engineers. Nothing they like better than a barbecue."

When Tommy nodded, he added, "Looking for work?"

The boy didn't know what to say to that, but Freddy did. "Bet your ass we are," he rumbled. "We're your new act."

One of Cal's eyebrows rose.

"Never seen a talking pig, huh?" Freddy twisted his head to aim an eye at the man. "That's not the act. C'mon, Tom-tom. 'Kafoozalum.'"

Later, Tommy learned why Cal called his nightclub "The Spider's Web."

He and Freddy, Cal told them, were the warm-up act. Their job was to get the nightclub's patrons in the right mood for the dancer and to fill in the gaps between her sets. More important, they were to encourage the patrons to refresh their drinks as often as possible. "Kafoozalum," he added, was just the right sort of piece, but it wasn't enough. He hoped they knew many more dirty songs.

They did. Unfortunately, it took a while to show their stuff. When Tommy carried the pig onto the small stage and the spotlight clicked on to reveal Freddy's distinctive barrel shape, his snout thrusting toward the ceiling, someone immediately yelled, "It's a garbage disposal!"

The room rocked with laughter.

Tommy blinked in the bright spot. His mouth gaped. He froze.

Freddy poked him in the ribs with a hoof. "C'mon, boy. The mike! The mike!"

Tommy stepped into position and, after another sharp nudge, began to sing. So did Freddy.

"He's a ventriloquist!"

"Oink! Oink!"

"Call the Engineers!"

They sang. First one bawdy song, and then one even bawdier. The crowd quieted as Tommy's rich tenor soared through the room, with Freddy's hoarse bass supporting it. After the third piece, someone even clapped, and after the fourth, the whole place applauded.

Tommy bowed. The spot blinked out, and he stepped into the shadow of the folding screen beside the small stage. A dim red light marked the door that led,

STARRY MESSENGER.



A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

We think he did a fine job at *Galileo*, and, in fact, it was on the strength of that performance that we picked him to help turn *Aboriginal Science Fiction* into the first successful SF magazine in a decade.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley and Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

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Cal had told him, to the dressing room.

He was wiping sweat from his forehead when someone patted his shoulder and murmured, "Good job, guys." The voice was soft, feminine, but when he turned, no one was there. He tried to say something, but a blare of recorded music drowned him out.

"Watch the stage, dummy," said Freddy.

The glare of the spot clicked on again, and he saw: black hair, glistening in the light, falling halfway down a bare back: a mass of black fur cradled in a bare arm: a profile undimmed by cloth of any kind. She — *she!* — had touched him. Like that! He had never seen such ... Never been so close to He gasped in unison with the collective sigh of the nightclub's patrons.

The music paused while Cal's voice echoed from a hidden speaker: "Muffy! The Spider Lady!"

She flung her arms to the sides, leaving the mass of fur clinging to her belly. She began to dance, and the fur extended legs and began to crawl over her torso, now baring, now concealing.

A chill ran down Tommy's back, and Freddy shuddered in his arms. "It's a goddamn ...!" Tommy nodded. The audience whistled and howled. Muffy the Spider Lady danced, and her spider moved, a creepy-crawly fan for a fan-dancer who was anything but.

It was a week before Tommy really met the dancer. Every night, when the stage went dark, she rode a current of perfume and sweat past him, and he trembled, his eyes straining to penetrate the shadows behind the screen. He felt the brush of her skin on his shoulder, his hip, even his hand, the rasp of spider fur, the sweep of her hair. But he saw almost nothing. Even the dim glow of the exit light gave him only hints of what she displayed so openly on the stage.

He never saw her talking to Cal. He never saw her arriving, dressed, her spider perhaps carried in a cage or led on a leash. He never saw her leaving the club for a home somewhere else. Did she, like him, have a room upstairs in the old hotel? He began to wonder whether it was all — the city, his singing, the money accumulating bit by bit in his pocket, Muffy herself — a dream.

One morning, Tommy came down to breakfast and found Muffy at the long table in the kitchen ahead of him. She was wearing faded jeans and a brightly flowered blouse. Her spider sat on the table beside her, working on what seemed to be a rat swathed in silk.

"Randy catches them in the basement and hangs them under the stairs." Muffy's voice, no longer low to hide itself behind the offstage screen, was throaty and warm, a friendly sound that reminded Tommy of home. A clean plate was in front of her, and an empty mug. Another plate and mug sat across the table. "I've been waiting for you."

Tommy found his voice only when Freddy poked him with a hoof. "I hope you haven't ..."

"I have a room on the second floor." She smiled.

"Right under yours. I came down when I heard you moving about."

"Oh."

Eventually, he remembered breakfast. Still dazed, he made toast for them both, poured coffee, found butter and jam and milk and sugar. And they talked.

Or rather, he talked. Muffy thought he seemed awfully young to be singing in a club, even though — he could see it — she was not much older, and she wanted to know how he came there.

He told her everything. He said that he had left home because he didn't know who his father really was. He said that he had taken Freddy with him because he was his best friend, and he deserved better than slavery. "And," Freddy interrupted, "I want a girl."

Tommy had thought that he must sound like an idiot, but Muffy had not left the table. She had stayed. She had had another cup of coffee with him. And a few days later, she knocked on his door to say, "Want to go out? There's a place I want to show you."

He didn't hesitate. Within minutes, he had retrieved the handcart from the storeroom behind the bar and loaded Freddy and Randy aboard. And they were off.

As they turned into the square Tommy had fled on his first day in town, he said, "I hope we don't meet any of those Engineers."

She laughed, and he stared at her hands beside his on the cart's handle. He felt suddenly faint, and his gait faltered, though the tug of the cart quickly brought his mind back to his duty. "They're noisy," she agreed. "And they like to roast the litterbugs. But the things breed like flies, so we'd have to get rid of the surplus anyway. And they are delicious. They're modified pigs, you know."

Tommy hated to argue, not with her thigh brushing his as they pushed the cart along the walk, but his memories were fresh. "Freddy's a pig too. And" He told her of what he had fled.

The day was warm. When she shook her head, the scent that reached him was a blend of clean hair, fresh sweat, and a faint acidity of spider, distinct from the odor rising off the cart. That, he thought, was spider and pig, and the latter's musk had to be part of his own odor.

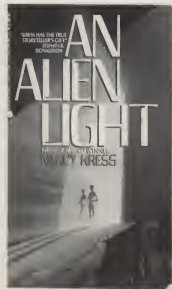
Her hand moved sideways on the cart handle to pat his own. He let her steer him through the square and past the town library, past a park, past stables and office buildings and hotels, to a small museum with an exhibit of engineered art works. They went in, and he saw a cloud of gnats that hovered in the shape of a head, changing constantly in expression, sex, age, and even species. There was a beast whose very breath was perfume, and whose form was ... Freddy said it reminded him of leftover lobster stew, pouring warmly down his gullet after the family meal. There were corals that built colorful sculptures. There were flowers unlike anything ever seen in an Earthly garden. There were ... There were bars on the win-

(Continued to page 58)



An Alien Light
By Nancy Kress
Avon, 1989
360 pp., \$3.50

Alien contact is one of the oldest themes in science fiction, but SF authors continue to wring new story ideas from it. With *An*



Alien Light, Nancy Kress joins the ranks of those who have succeeded in bringing something original to the theme.

The planet Qom is inhabited by humans who are, we quickly realize, the remnants of some sort of

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

Sunlight

failed expedition; they have lost all memory of their origins and are living a relatively primitive existence. Their two cities — Delys, a mercantile society, and Jela, which is reminiscent of Sparta — are always either at war or planning for the next war, and hatred between them runs deep.

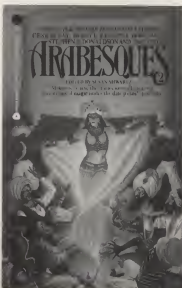
Into this situation come the alien Ged, who are involved in an interstellar war with the main body of humanity and seek to study the humans of Qom in order to understand their adversary. Humans are the only race to have achieved star travel while still committing intra-species violence; all other such violent races destroy themselves before getting that far.

The Ged build a walled city called R'Frow, a sort of giant laboratory, and lure several hundred Delysians and Jelites there with the promise of jewels and new weapons. The promise is kept, but in a way neither the humans nor the Ged could have anticipated. We follow what happens through the eyes of Ayrys, a glassmaker exiled from Delys, and Jehane, a sister-warrior of Jela, as well as some of the subsidiary human characters and the Ged.

An Alien Light is very good — exciting, credible, and suspenseful. Kress successfully gets into the heads of the Ged, who are convincingly alien, as well as the heads of her human characters, who are pretty alien themselves. I liked the opposition of Delys and Jela, each with its own well-developed culture and its own flaws. The book centers on the old science-fictional theme of human uniqueness, but the cliché

is given new life here.

The novel does end with a small *deus ex machina*, but this is after the final plot resolution and so not as bothersome as it might have been. Kress doesn't spare the reader from her characters' strange ways of thinking, so the book can be hard to get into, but it's



well worth sticking with until you figure out what's going on. If I had the time, I'd like to read it over again, to catch what I missed the first time through.

An Alien Light is striking and absorbing. Though I was hesitant at first because of the old concept behind the plot, Kress soon won me over. She has created both excellent characters and a credible science-fictional plot, a combination that's all too rare these days.

Read it and see how it's done.

Rating: ★★★★★

Arabesques 2

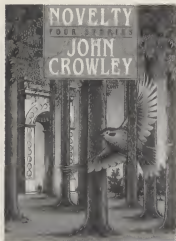
Edited by Susan Shwartz

Avon, 1989

373 pp. in proof, \$3.95

Susan Shwartz's second anthology of "more tales from the Arabian Nights" continues the high standard of the first one. *Arabesques 2* is an impressive collection of fantasy stories, written by some of the top names in the business as well as some newer authors. It's certainly welcome relief from Celtic and Nordic fantasies.

However, there is a certain feeling of sameness that accumulates as you read through the



book, despite variations in style; this is an anthology best appreciated over a period of time. While none of the stories is less than good, those in the middle tend to be weaker and did not hold my interest as well.

The first story, Stephen R. Donaldson's "The Djinn Who Watches Over the Accused," is intriguing and troubling. It's been several weeks since I read it, and I still can't get it out of my head. Esther M. Friesner's contribution, "The Hour's Mirror," displays to good effect her warped imagination and sense of humor, providing a much-needed break from the somberness of most of the stories. Larry Niven's "The Wishing Game," which appeared in

Aboriginal SF, is clever, if not really an "Arabian Nights"-style tale; though it's about a djinni, it feels a bit out of place.

Melissa Scott has contributed an interesting variant on *The Merchant of Venice*, and her version makes a lot more sense than the original. Gene Wolfe's "The Tale of the Four Accused" is brilliantly written and imagined, as you would expect from Wolfe. In "The Flower Princess," the last story in the anthology, Diana L. Paxson catches the "Arabian Nights" atmosphere and says something important to boot. There are also stories by Harry Turtledove, Tanith Lee, Ru Emerson, Judith Tarr, Nancy Springer, M. J. Engh, Charles Sheffield, Marvin Kaye, Katharine Eliska Kimbriel, and Cherry Wilder.

Shwartz's frame story does a good job of setting the mood of the anthology and linking it to the first *Arabesques*, and the stories she's commissioned are, in general, excellent. I recommend the book to anyone who enjoys fantasy.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Novelty

By John Crowley

Foundation/Doubleday, 1989

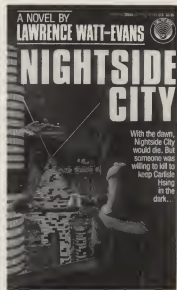
240 pp., \$18.95 hc, \$6.95 pb

John Crowley's latest book, *Novelty*, is a collection of four stories of varying style, length, and subject matter whose connecting theme is the incompatibility of humanity with "Perfect Peace," the necessity for conflict and change. He has approached this theme from several different directions, with different degrees of success.

The first story, "The Nightingale Sings at Night," is a well done, if simple (simplistic, even), retelling of the Garden of Eden story. Crowley's version of the myth has crucial differences from our own but obviously springs from the same sources; I like it better than the one in *Genesis*. The story explains why the expulsion from Eden was necessary, and it carries all the flavor of an authentic myth. It's evocative, but not as striking as it ought to have been.

The longest piece, "Great Work of Time," is a complex, ab-

sorbing, credible, and original work about time travel and alternate universes, in which a group of loyal Britons funded by Cecil Rhodes's estate travel back and forth in time to ensure the continuation of the Pax Britannica. (Its central conceit is reminiscent of Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*, but the story remains uniquely Crowley's.) The story is poetic, moving, and full of fascinating details about our own world and the others we encounter, with one of the most chilling images of the future I've run across. It can be a little obscure at times — maybe less so if you're very familiar with the last century of British history — but overall it's a mar-



velous work.

"In Blue" is a disturbing, convincing, somewhat obscure dystopia, and one of the most depressing I've ever read. Like the previous story, it shows clearly how horrible (literally) Perfect Peace would be, in the form of the tyranny of the well-meaning who understand society far too well. The story is difficult to penetrate, but once you get there, the main character's philosophical writhings are oddly fascinating. The ending, unfortunately, is not completely satisfying.

The title story is the weakest: a self-absorbed piece about a writer. The description of the book

he wants to write is great, and I'd rather have read that.

Novelty is a fine showcase for one of the most interesting writers in the field. "Great Work of Time" alone would be enough for me to recommend it, but there's gold to be found in the other pieces as well.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Nightside City

By Lawrence Watt-Evans

Del Rey, 1989

227 pp., \$3.95

Many authors setting out to write a hard-boiled mystery novel make the mistake of trying to imitate Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler, usually badly. Lawrence Watt-Evans, however, has avoided that pitfall. *Nightside City* is a very enjoyable, well-done hardboiled mystery with a convincing science-fictional setting.

Epimetheus is locked into an orbit which keeps one side permanently in daylight and one in night — or so everyone thought. *Nightside City* was built on the dark side to take advantage of these conditions, becoming a popular site for tourists. However, the planet has turned out to be rotating very slowly after all, which means that the end is approaching for *Nightside City*.

As the novel opens, Carlisle Hsing, a private eye who, because of the enemies she's made, is just barely managing to eke out an existence, is approached with a bizarre case. Why is somebody buying up land on the side of the city which is about to be hit with the deadly rays of the sun? Neither the question nor its answer, of course, is simple.

As it should be, Watt-Evans's style is clean and unobtrusive. Carlisle Hsing is an engaging and sympathetic character, and the mystery is exciting and suspenseful, even though the resolution is somewhat anti-climactic. The few necessary expository lumps go down pretty painlessly. The other characters are all peripheral, but they're believable as far as they go.

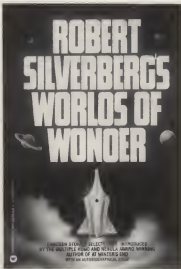
The background is detailed and credible. Details are what make a book like this work, and, for the most part, it reads more

like a mystery novel written then (in the mid-24th century) than an SF novel written now, which is an admirable accomplishment. There are occasional glitches, like a reference to the Doors — why has someone who, despite living in a major gambling center, has no idea of the origin of the name Las Vegas, heard of and listened to the music of the Doors? Moments like that are jarring.

Those are nits, though. Overall, *Nightside City* is a very strong novel, one of the best SF mysteries I've read, and I highly recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder



Edited by Robert Silverberg

Warner, 1989

352 pp., \$12.95

Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder is a remarkable and unique anthology, with much to recommend it. Not just another gathering of classic stories, it is a literary autobiography, with Silverberg's introduction and afterwords; either the stories themselves or the commentaries would alone be worth the price of the book.

The anthology includes thirteen stories, primarily from the '50s and '60s, by authors such as Alfred Bester, C. L. Moore, James

Blish, Brian Aldiss, and Philip K. Dick. Each of the stories had a strong influence on Silverberg as he learned to write. Most are classics, which you ought to read if you haven't yet done so, including Cordwainer Smith's "Scanners Live in Vain," C. M. Kornbluth's "The Little Black Bag," Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit," and Bob Shaw's "Light of Other Days." Silverberg has also included a few less well-known, but good, stories which have aspects worth considering.

Then there are Silverberg's afterwords, in which he analyzes each story for what makes it work, how it accomplishes it, and, yes, its flaws. I saw stories I thought I knew well through new eyes after reading these perceptive pieces. Finally there's his long autobiographical introduction, amusing, revealing, and interesting, especially to Silverberg fans like me.

If you're a would-be writer, you can't afford to miss this anthology; even if you aren't one, you shouldn't miss it. *Worlds of Wonder* is a great introduction to the stories and authors key to the development of modern SF.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Phases of Gravity

By Dan Simmons

Bantam/Spectra, 1989

278 pp., \$4.50

I'm puzzled that Bantam has published Dan Simmons's *Phases of Gravity* in its line of "Spectra Special Editions." It's not SF by any stretch of the imagination. Its only connection to the field is that it's about an astronaut; otherwise it is purely a mainstream novel. Perhaps the publishers felt that the subject matter would appeal more to SF fans. The novel has its own virtues, which make it worth reading, but don't pick it up expecting hard SF.

Phases of Gravity has some of the flaws common to much of today's mainstream fiction: it's self-involved and doesn't have much of a plot. Former Apollo astronaut Richard Baedeker just wanders around trying to find a meaningful life, and does, in a bout of mysticism fueled by an en-

counter with a convenient Cheyenne Indian. That convenient ending is a flaw more common to SF, actually, as is the novel's occasional preachiness about the space program.

On the other hand, the book is beautifully written, and the main characters are wonderful. Baedecker and the other two ex-astronauts from his Moon mission are solid, likable, and credible. The chapters where Baedecker spends time with his former colleagues are the most powerful in the book. The other major characters are less effective: Baedecker's son Scott remains a cipher, and love interest Maggie Brown feels more like wish-fulfillment. The writing is

James Patrick Kelly's new novel is interesting but badly flawed. The first 100 pages or so of *Look Into the Sun* simply did not catch and hold my interest. After that, it becomes enjoyable, but most people probably won't make it that far. That's too bad, because there is some fine writing hiding in the book.

Phillip Wing is an architect who has designed the Glass Cloud, an enormous, mobile piece of artwork. His life, though, is falling apart, as his wife becomes more and more involved with the religion brought to Earth by the alien Messengers, and as he wonders how he can top himself.

Meanwhile, the Chani of the planet Asenesesh are engaged in a religious struggle which will determine their future in the galaxy. The planet's Thearch has consulted Chan — both sun and god — and has received the revelation that her death alone will save her people. The Messenger Ndavu wants to recruit Wing to travel to Asenesesh to design a tomb for the Thearch that will be a permanent sign to her people that she has gone out into the universe, as they must.

The first 100 pages are essentially a prologue, set on the near-future Earth; all the real action of the story takes place on the planet Asenesesh. Yes, that first section sets up the characters, but it simply drags. I didn't give a damn about the Glass Cloud, or about Phillip's reluctance to meet with Ndavu, and much of the detail the author provides is pointless.

I did get involved once we got to Asenesesh. Kelly has created a fascinating and believable world, and I liked his exploration of what a culture might be like if the people were effectively immortal, as the Chani are. The Chani religion and the cultural conflict are both very well portrayed. The plot as summarized above doesn't sound like much, but I've greatly oversimplified it; it's complex, but it works well, although I saw the ending coming.

The novel might have been better if we didn't spend so much time in the tormented artist's soul of Phillip Wing — writers love to write about tormented artists' souls, and there's a certain

sameness to all such descriptions. Though it's not very long, the book occasionally feels padded. However, I did enjoy the novel after the first 100 pages. *Look Into the Sun* is worth reading despite its flaws.

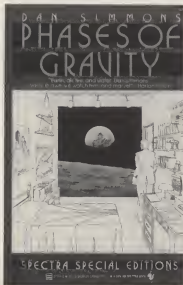
Rating: ☆☆☆

The Dying Sun

By Gary L. Blackwood
Atheneum, 1989
213 pp., \$13.95

Gary L. Blackwood's *The Dying Sun* is an excellent Young Adult novel about the coming of a new Ice Age. Old Adults should enjoy it just as much — I certainly did.

As the glaciers crept southward, so did the population of North America, until by the 2050s most of it is living in inconceivably



generally clear, but the long section about the life and death of one of the astronauts, though touching, is confusing in its shifts of time and tense.

Phases of Gravity contains some striking episodes and characters, as well as a fascinating look into the minds of the men who went to the Moon, and those aspects make it worth reading. If you care about space exploration at all, this book will move you.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Look Into the Sun

By James Patrick Kelly
Tor, 1989
281 pp., \$17.95



crowded cities on both sides of the Mexican/American border. In addition to the difficult living conditions, the inhabitants are plagued by Mexican guerillas who don't take kindly to this usurpation of their country. When James Simpson's parents decide to leave Matamoros and move north to the cold of Missouri to homestead a farm, he elects to stay in Matamoros and finish out high school. When the guerilla war strikes home, though, he and his friend Robert decide to make the long trek north to join his family.

Because it is a Young Adult novel, *The Dying Sun* has a simple, straightforward plot line and clean, uncluttered prose, which are

advantages at any age. There's no sex or foul language, of course, and little violence, but there's no sense of the author censoring himself.



The book provides a well thought out and credible scenario of the future, and Blackwood is very good at conveying what this world is like without lecturing, by including little details (a stack of newspapers worth \$100, for example). As detail piles on detail, life in both Matamoros and Missouri is made vividly real.

The novel's moral is admirable, but not forced down the reader's throat, and James's growth is well depicted. I recommend *The Dying Sun* to young and old alike.

Rating: ★★★★★

Star Trek: The Next Generation
#5: *Strike Zone*
By Peter David
Pocket, 1989
275 pp., \$3.95

Why am I reviewing a *Star Trek* novel? Well, I have a soft spot in my heart for the show, which keeps me from complete snobbery, and I believe that it's possible to write a good *Star Trek* novel, as several authors have proved, though it's a difficult feat. I had heard good things about Peter David, so I decided to give this book a try.

It turned out to be an enjoyable quick read. David writes with an adeptly light touch; the book doesn't have a particularly comic

plot, but I laughed out loud several times. The story involves a cache of highly advanced weapons discovered by the relatively primitive and annoying Krel, who use them to attack their bitterest enemies, the Klingons. The *Enterprise* has to ferry representatives of both races to the planet where the weapons were found, trying both to make peace and to discover the origins of the weapons. While nothing special, it was enough to hold my interest, although I must confess that a few weeks after reading it I couldn't remember the plot at all.

David does a good job of giving depth to the characters and dealing with the various stupid situations the series has stuck him with. Unfortunately, the plot ends dreadfully, with an advanced alien race testing humans — something that's a tired cliché not just within the SF field, but within *Star Trek* itself, as the character of Captain Picard acknowledges, sort of. That makes the ending very disappointing and unsatisfying.

The book is a lot of fun until



then, though, enough to make me want to go read David's first novel, *Knight Life*. Unless the thought of *Star Trek* makes you run screaming into the night (in which case you're unlikely to be reading this review), you'll enjoy it.

Rating: ★★★

Our Next Issue



The Nov.-Dec. 1989 issue of *Aboriginal* features Nebula-Award winner James Morrow with "Bible Stories for Adults No. 31: The Covenant" and humorist Esther M. Friesner with the "The Doo-wop Never Dies." In honor of Salman Rushdie and the late Ayatollah Khomeini, it will be the magazine's special holiday **blasphemy** issue. Joining Jim and Esther will be Ralph Vaughan and Phillip Jennings, who have appeared in previous issues of *Aboriginal*, and Lois Tilton and Graham P. Collins, both new to these pages. All the stories address the age-old questions of who are we? where did we come from? is there a god, and if so, what is god like? and to whom are we gods? Needless to say, we call it our special blasphemy issue because the answers our authors come up with aren't necessarily in the Good Book. Oh, one story is a non-traditional Christmas story that'll tickle a certain Englishman's bones in his grave. And in the upcoming Jan.-Feb. 1990 issue we will kick off a three-part special featuring Hugo- and Nebula-Award winner Frederik Pohl and Hugo-Award winning artist Frank Kelly Freas, who have teamed up for "The Gateway Concordance" — a history of humanity's contact with the Heechee made famous in Pohl's Hugo- and Nebula-award winning *Gateway* novels.

Energy Source

Two issues ago we brought you **Larry Niven's** "The Wishing Game." Now for another story set in that same world where magic pools in limited quantities, like any energy source: "The Portrait of Daryanree the King."

Niven, of course, is the author of *Ringworld* and *The Ringworld*



Larry Niven

Engineers. He is also well known for successful collaborations, most recently *The Legacy of Heorot* (Pocket Books) with **Jerry Pournelle** and **Steven Barnes**, and this year's *The*



Pat Morrissey

Barsoom Project (Ace), also with Barnes. Niven lives in California with his wife, Marilyn, and says his favorite hobby is "fandom."

"Portrait" is illustrated by **Pat Morrissey**. I spoke to her while she was attending Disclave in Washington, DC, and having "a good time, relaxing" for a change at a convention.

Morrissey says she took her cue from the story and actually mixed some hair and cloth into her painting to give it texture (and power perhaps?). Pat has recently completed illustrations for *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, Easton Press, and Doubleday.

"The Bob Dylan Solution" is by **Walter Jon Williams**, an author attracting a lot of attention. His story, "Surfacing," was nominated for a Hugo and a Nebula this year.

"The Bob Dylan Solution" will be coming out in a collection of Williams's short stories called *Facets* (Tor) in late 1989. His newest novel, *Angel Station* (Tor), is just coming out in hardcover.



Walter Jon Williams



Bob Eggleton

"Solution" is illustrated by **Pat Marrissey**.

"A Matter of Thirst" is written by **Bill Johnson** and illustrated by our cover artist for this issue, **Bob Eggleton**. Johnson's stories have appeared in *Analog*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Amazing*. His latest, "Business as Usual," appeared in *Analog* in July, 1988.

Johnson says he suffers from low productivity. Between his job as a software quality assurance manager and raising two children with his wife, **Gretchen**, he only gets enough time to write one or two stories a year.

Johnson says his pet peeve is "sloppy science in writing." And how about this for an interesting fact: Johnson discovered that the creator of those cutesy "My Little Pony" dolls is a balding ex-marine.

Artist Eggleton was nominated this year for a Hugo and was also one of 39 American artists chosen to display astronomical art in a Planetary Society exhibit touring the Soviet Union. But he says "ultimately, film work is where I want to go." Through a friend, he got hooked up with an independent producer and is now working on the conceptual artwork for a science fiction movie.

Oh, and if you're going to Noreascon III, the 1989 Worldcon, in Boston in September, look for Bob's work on the cover of the program book and the **Andre Norton** souvenir book.



Patricia Anthony

Pat Anthony's "Belief Systems" is her eighth story for *Aboriginal*; her past stories include "Good Neighbor" (Sept-Oct 1988) and "Bluebonnets" in our last issue. Pat says she's now working on a novel which a friend calls a cross between *In the Heat of the Night*, *E.T.*, and "Mike Hammer." It's about an East Texas murder and there are aliens involved. She's also teaching creative writing at Collin County Junior College, located north of Dallas, and

looking forward to the day she becomes a full-time writer.

"Belief Systems" is illustrated by **David Deitrick**, a frequent *Aboriginal* contributor. He says the model for the boy in the art is his son **Sean**, age 7. Deitrick says he's been doing a lot of graphic design work lately. I asked the Alaskan resident and self-proclaimed "bunny hugger" what he thought about Exxon's oil spill cleanup effort. He called it "a travesty. The only damage control was in public relations."



David Deitrick

That PR effort was not enough to quell the anger of Alaskans. The state Senate recently defeated a measure that would have cut oil company taxes when the price of oil declines.

R. David Ludwig is the author of "Made for Each Other." Ludwig's first published short story appeared a year ago, and since then he's sold seven other stories to magazines like *Eldritch Tales* and *Beyond*. His book *Thunder Veldt* is being published by Other World books and he's now working on a mystery novel called *Murder at the Oasis*. He's also working on episodes of "Night Court" and "Star Trek: The



R. David Ludwig

Sept./Oct. 1989

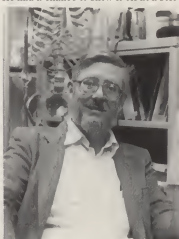


Robert Pasternak

Next Generation," and has retained an agent for his screenplays. The 30-year-old California writer, who's also a company vice president, says he's going back to finish college.

"Made for Each Other" is illustrated by **Robert Pasternak**. Pasternak is a native and resident of Winnipeg and was influenced early in his career by **Roger Dean's** "Yes" and "Asia" album covers and **Frank Frazetta's** art.

Pasternak describes the art he creates as "pretty strange, surreal." He had a chance to show it off at a solo



Thomas A. Easton

exhibit in Winnipeg recently that got good reviews.

Robert says the couple in the illustration are his parents. And speaking of parents, Pasternak says he is in the midst of a dilemma — his wife is expecting her first child right around the time of the Worldcon and he's "going crazy" wondering if he should plan to go or stay home.

"Sing a Song of Porkchops" is by **Thomas A. Easton**. Easton is a theoretical biologist who teaches at Thomas



Larry Blamire

College in Waterville, Maine. Much of Easton's work is set in the same genetically engineered universe that gives us garbage disposal pigs. He calls it "gonzo biology."

His novel *Sparrowhawk* is being serialized in *Analog* starting in October, and his story "Down on the Truck Farm" will be coming out in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Easton also writes "automated" poetry. He developed a computer program that "throws up" phrases from a list of vocabulary words. Easton simply "throws away whatever doesn't look like a poem." He's published 50 poems this way, and one even made it all the way to the finals of the Odyssey poetry contest at Brigham Young University.

"Sing a Song" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**. Larry, a prolific playwright, has a show running through the summer at Captain Courageous restaurant in Gloucester, Massachusetts.



John B. Rosenman

Blamire wrote, directed, and plays one role in "Murder on the *Nom De Plume*." He says the dinner theater production is a spoof of audience par-

ticipation murder mysteries, and it comes after he spent seven months in one such play in Boston, called "Murder at Rutherford House."

John B. Rosenman wrote the poem "Moon." Rosenman is an assistant professor of English at Norfolk State University in Virginia and the editor of the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization (SPWAO) newsletter. He has a collection of horror stories with a great title, *Dreadtime Tales*, being published this year by Baker Street Publications, and his story "Mazzarelli on Mars" just appeared in *SPWAO Showcase 7*.

Nebula Award winners

This year's Nebula Award winners were announced on Saturday, April 22, at the Penta Hotel in New York City.

The winners, selected by ballot by members of SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America), were:

BEST NOVEL

Falling Free by **Lols McMaster Bujold**

BEST NOVELLA

"The Last of the Winnebagos" by **Connie Willis**

BEST NOVELLETTE

"Schrodinger's Kitten" by **George Alec Effinger**

BEST SHORT STORY

"Bible Stories for Adults, No. 17: The Deluge" by **James Morrow**

GRAND MASTER AWARD Ray Bradbury

S.F. at U.N.

The 5th annual achievement awards ceremony for the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future contest was held at the United Nations in New York this year. The program featured internationally-known figures in science fiction and science such as Nobel Prize physicist Sheldon Glashow, NASA chief astronomer Yoji Kondo, and Jerry Pournelle talking about how SF ideas could be a source of solutions to real-world problems. Also present were the 15 new authors whose stories appear in *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume 7*.

The grand prize winner was Gary Shockley, who won \$4,000 and also took first place in the second quarter. The other winners included: Jamil Nasir, whose first published story appeared in the May-June 1988 issue of *Aboriginal*, Mark Anthony, Stephen C. Fisher, Stephen M. Baxter, Paula May, Virginia Baker, Calvin Johnson, J. Stephen York, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes and Alan Wexelblat, Marc Matz, K.D. Wentworth, Steve Martindale, whose story "Technomancy" will appear in an upcoming issue of *Aboriginal*, and Eolake Stobblehouse. □



The first-place award winners in the annual L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest were: (l-r) Dan'l Danehy-Oakes and Alan Wexelblat; Gary W. Shockley; Virginia Baker; and Jamil Nasir. Shockley won the grand prize for best story.

Belief Systems

(Continued from page 8)

and go back to my hiding place. I sleep for a few hours.

The next day I go to the ship for more food.

"Who is that man?" one of the kids asks Mike.

"What man?" Mike asks. His gaze slides past me.

The kid, a dark one, doesn't ask again.

Hiding is lonely, so I sort of hang around with the kids. They tried to talk to me yesterday, but I didn't talk back. Today they don't look at me much.

Mike's finished with the cabins and he's putting in the gardens. He plants peas and beans and squash and hangs the empty little packets of vegetables on tiny crosses at the end of the rows, like something he loved was buried there.

When he is finished planting, he straightens. I am standing down at the end of the rows.

"Hi, Mike," I say.

He looks down and dusts his hands.

"Thank you for not killing me. I know you were supposed to."

He pretends like he doesn't hear. After a moment

he picks his way through the rows to the ship. He makes a big white cross out of two sticks and pounds it into the dirt where he buried the rock. He stands over the cross for a while. When two of the kids get into a fight, he leaves.

Mike gently pulls the two kids apart. He kisses the one kid who's crying and hugs the other who's not. Then he gives every one of the kids candy and tells them to take their naps. I guess being a babysitter is what his program is all about.

That night, around the campfire, he tells them the story of Beauty and the Beast. Mike tells a story good. His voice is all hushed and tense at the exciting part, his tone loud and happy for the ending.

When the story is over there are a few minutes of quiet. I'm not sure if the kids are just tired or if the story got to them. Then one of them turns around towards me and points at my chest the way Mike had pointed the pulse pistol. "Who is that ghost?" he asks.

The kid must have asked the right question, because Mike stiffens. He finally looks around the flames, sees me in the orange shadows, and closes his eyes. His face looks like they had programmed him to understand pain.

"That used to be Danny," he says. □

Thirst

(Continued from page 17)

them? What about their families? Don't you owe them anything?"

"Will you obey orders?"

"For God's sake, Jim! Yes, I'll obey the order. Just shut up. Just shut up and leave me alone. I'll bring you your damned ice."

"Thank you, Antony."

"Go to hell."

The *Aquarius*, a bright metal beetle covered in ice, hung over the cargo bay. Carol watched it on the screen and pulled her blanket tighter around her. The heat was on high but she felt cold.

Blair sat next to her and stared at the screen. A medical shuttle docked with the ship. Carol watched the cargo handlers strip the ice from the ship and carry it inside. She closed her eyes and said Thank You.

"There they go."

She opened her eyes. The medical shuttle fired rockets. The backflash washed the ice a faint pink.

"Antony wouldn't tell me how many died," Blair said. "I made them die and he wouldn't even tell me who they were or how many. Their families don't even know and they kept asking—"

"Quiet. Calm down and stop preaching. Sackcloth and ashes are for the monks. You did what had to be done. Now be quiet and let me think."

They want me to find my successor. They want to use all of me, every last bit, before I die. I will die soon.

Carol looked at the thought. She didn't want to die. It hurt, and she didn't like things that hurt, but there was nothing she could do. She looked at Blair. Her job

was to take the long-term view.

"They brought a full load of ice back. We have water to spare. We'll trade some of it to the other cylinders, but we'll still have excess. I want you to use it."

"For what?"

"Your shuttle. I want to go to Earth."

Blair shook his head. "I don't want to go. I'm tired of killing."

Carol wanted to grab and shake him. She hit a button and all the screens went dark.

"You don't have a choice. I'll die before we can train someone else. The new Secretary will be just like I was, afraid to take a risk until she's forced. We have to take risks now, when we have a margin for error."

Blair was silent. He reached over the console and turned on the screen. The medical shuttle docked with the cylinder.

"Why do you want this? Really?" he asked.

Carol stared at the wall. She tucked the blanket under herself.

"I almost died in that bathroom. Face down in the grime and the dirt and I almost died. It was horrible. I've never felt so desolate. The world wasn't even black and white, just shades of gray. That's what I've done. I've kept everything running, but that's all. Now I have one last chance to do something, to make a difference. Very few people get that chance. I don't want to miss it."

"I don't owe you anything. I don't owe anyone anything. Admit it."

Carol thought for a moment. She nodded.

"You don't owe anyone anything."

Blair relaxed and sagged in his chair. He turned the screen so it showed the Earth. A hurricane covered the Caribbean and clear weather dominated the plains. Carol thought he looked very young.

"I've always wanted to see Earth."

"We have to hurry. I'll delay the nomination as long as possible."

"This doesn't make everything all right, you know. I still killed those crew. Antony still hates me. You've done terrible things to me, Carol."

"I wonder what season it will be, when you touch down?"

Blair frowned. He thought for a moment.

"Spring, I think. We can be ready by spring." □

Porkchops (Continued from page 48)

dows, and a steel gate that could be dropped like a portcullis over the door. When Tommy asked the attendant, he was told simply, "Engineers."

Freddy had just sighed and murmured, "Let's get outta here," when an inconspicuous doorway opened in one wall. From it stepped a small man whose forehead extended above his ears. He wore a white lab coat such as Tommy had often seen on the veedo shows. With one hand, he beckoned to them.

Muffy tugged on Tommy's hand. "C'mon," she said. "I know him."

Tommy turned the handcart toward the doorway. The man held the door, waved them through, and let it shut behind. A short hallway stretched before them, ending in a single lighted room. "In there, please. The engineers do go further than they should sometimes. But then they give us such lovely things, you know. That's why we're here. And ..."

On a padded table sat a creature. Its hide was checkered black and tan. Its legs were four hollow tubes that jutted uselessly into the air. Its blunt snout projected upward much like Freddy's.

"I'm Peirce," the man said. "The curator. We call her Porculata."

"Lovely," said Freddy. He began to twitch, and Randy fled the cart for Muffy's shoulder.

"I'm a bagpipe," said Porculata. She too could talk.

"The engineers used duck genes to run air sacs into her limbs," said Peirce. "Then ..."

"Ohhh," moaned Freddy. "Can I stay? We'll make beautiful ..."

Peirce looked at Tommy. "I can give you an ordinary disposal to take back to your parents, if you wish. And you can visit anytime."

Tommy looked from Peirce to Muffy. "But ..." Freddy was his friend. He needed him. But he had told himself, and Muffy, and Jimmy, and Freddy too, that he wanted to give his friend freedom.

"Please?" said Freddy.

Tommy sighed. He bent to lift Freddy from the cart. He held him, petting the bristly hide, sniffing the long-familiar aroma, bending his head to hide the tears. Finally, he set his friend down on the table.

Freddy moaned and began to twitch himself closer to Porculata.

Porculata swelled as she drew in air, and the room filled with sound. It resembled an oboe more than it did a real bagpipe.

"Do you want the replacement?" asked Peirce.

"I ..." Surely his parents had bought a new garbage disposal by now. But how could he ask them?

How could he face them?

Muffy moved closer to his side. Her hand stroked his arm gently. Randy's bristles tickled his cheek. Both were comforting.

Finally, he managed to say, "I'll have to think about it."

Tommy didn't have the heart to tear Freddy away from Porculata. He had to leave his old friend in Peirce's hands, at least for awhile. At the same time, he knew that he would have to go home eventually. Thinking about trading Freddy for a new and mindless pig was simply stalling.

But the stalling couldn't work for long. When he and Muffy returned to The Spider's Web, he had to explain to Cal why Freddy was not with them.

Cal's reaction was simple: "You can't perform alone."

Of course not. Why hadn't he thought of that? But....

"Sure, you can stay," Cal sighed. "I could use another hand in the kitchen anyway."

Tommy accepted the comedown. He had to. It kept him close to Muffy, and he could, as Peirce had promised, visit Freddy whenever he wished. But Freddy was growing distant.

"Listen," Freddy said one day, and he and his new friend played duets far more sophisticated to Tommy's ear than anything he had ever been a part of.

"Listen," he said, and he sang a love song. "I made that one up."

"Call me Frederick," he said. "And have you heard? We're going to have a litter! Ah, the pitter patter of little trotters! If they can walk."

"We're setting up a new exhibit," Peirce told him after that. "We have to do it soon, or she'll be too big to play. Though we're looking forward to seeing what the hybrids will be like."

"Right," said Tommy, unable to keep a sour note from his voice. "A singing garbage disposal, with bagpipe accompaniment. They'll be a great hit. And the shoats will be calliopes."

"You and Freddy did all right at the Web," said Muffy.

"Do you think the two of you could sing a song or two for old time's sake?" asked Peirce.

"And you could invite your parents!" said Muffy.

He hesitated. Then, reluctantly, he shook his head.

"I'd be with you."

He took Muffy's hand in his. He sighed. He had succeeded in giving Freddy — Frederick — all he had ever wanted. But what about his own needs? His real father had walked out of his life before he had even been born. Now he had walked out of his mother's life, and Ralph's, and there was no going back. Not yet.

Frederick interrupted his thoughts: "I'll bet you and Muffy could make some nice music too."

Muffy's hand squeezed his. He raised his eyes to look at her. She was grinning at him.

Somehow, when they were together, he was the one who did all the talking. He barely knew her.

But that was about to change. He could see it in her grin. □



Boomerangs

(Continued from page 33)

least one more staple to stiffen and strengthen the spine. All being done within the budget and at the proper time of course.

I am enclosing a check and an SASE. Please send a copy of the writer's and artist's guidelines. In closing, thank you for producing an excellent magazine and I hope it has a long and productive lifetime.

Sincerely yours,
Paul Marcum

Really Ryan,

It seems like one has to rant and rave on the immortal virtuoso of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* to be published in the letters column. The name of the magazine does trouble me. I have great compassion for those offended by its abbreviation. I suggest you rename it *Ralph's Science Fiction Magazine*. Just try it out for your next issue, I'm sure that you will notice a large change in the number of sales.

Please send a copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* with the following note from the editor:

"Entropy Increases in Ever Bigger Pieces; Gee I'll write anything to move this ten-year-old book." (Correct. — Ed.)

One last question from your long time subscriber (please find enclosed my renewal): who exactly won the contest to name the alien publisher? I can understand keeping the Alien's name secret (the more we know the less Alien it becomes) but surely we are entitled to know that lucky reader who won. (No one won, since we decided no name was better. — Ed.)

Mediocrely yours,
Ralph Miner
Elgin, IL

Dear Charlie,
Here's a \$30 check for an 18-issue renewal. Keep 'em coming.

Metzger continues fetchingly deranged. If he ever turns out a novel, we're all in trouble — I'm not sure Western Civilization can withstand such. (It better. He's working on his second. — Ed.) Your Metzger/Blamire pairing is your finest *Aboriginal* inspiration —

Continued growth to you.
Best,
Martha Soukup
Chicago, IL

Dear *Aboriginal*,

Here is my renewal at the smart rate. As you can see, it is barely in time to qualify. I meant to renew when I got the previous issue. I became so engrossed with reading it, that I simply forgot to send the renewal when I

finished.

When this issue showed up in my mailbox yesterday, I decided that the first thing I would do with this issue is to check for the renewal deadline. I found that I only had two days to spare! So, with no comment on this issue except that the illustrations I saw as I hunted for the renewal policy box are up to your usual high standards, here it is.

I am enclosing the address label from the bag this issue came in to make the search easier. There! Now I can start reading this issue and relax for eleven issues (next time I will renew with the issue before the deadline).

Keep the good stuff coming,
Jim Anderson
Springfield, IL

Attention: Charles C. Ryan
Dear Sir:

I applaud you for providing a forum for new writers. I have the good fortune to be in a writers' group with Patricia Anthony. In fact, she and her marvelous stories are the reason I originally subscribed to *Aboriginal*. And I have obtained her signature on every story of hers that you have printed.

I am possibly be prejudiced, but I think *Aboriginal* is the best magazine in the science fiction field!

Sincerely,
JoLynn Chandler
Garland, TX

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Unfortunately, I have let my subscription expire. Please renew it immediately! I must have been in a Paradise Syndrome and activated some sort of memory ray (out of sequence, of course). Well, I'm back.

I find your magazine refreshing, colorful, exciting, and other adjectives that have been used to describe *Aboriginal*. Please continue the good work.

Also, I appreciate reading material from new writers, as I'm sure they find your magazine an excellent platform from which to launch their careers. (By the way, the S.A.S.E. I've enclosed is for the writer's guidelines. I'd like to do a little launching myself.)

Enough praise. I'm sure you have lots of work to do for the next issue.

Bob Govoni
Townsend, MA

Dear Charlie:

David Brin's two-part "Science and the Fantastic" (March/April and May/June 1989) was not only extremely interesting, it helped to shed new light on the fundamental differences between "hard" science fiction and fantasy.

If I read David correctly, what he is really saying is that fantasy (magic) appeals to the adolescent wish-fulfill-

ment yearnings in us while science-based SF appeals to the rational, more adult part of our minds.

This helps to explain why SF of the fantastic sort is so popular, generation after generation. And why readers turn away from it once they reach emotional adulthood. But does this mean that those readers who continue to read fantasy after their acne clears up do not attain adulthood, emotionally? I fear this is so. After all, stories that deal with mightily-thewed warriors (some of them female nowadays) and phallic symbols such as swords and unicorns are the stuff of adolescence, regardless of the reader's calendar age.

Yet there is that adolescent in each of us, isn't there? Maybe when the human race finally achieves full adulthood and we don't need tales of magic and mighty deeds we'll be a lot wiser and even saner — but will we have as much fun?

As ever,
Ben Bova
West Hartford, CT

Dear Charlie & Folks at *Aboriginal*:

We really enjoy the stories in *Aboriginal*. We subscribe to more magazines than anyone you care to know about, but *Aboriginal* is the only one that features fiction. It's a welcome break, and we admittedly begrudge any space allotted to nonfiction. So we hope you understand where we're coming from when we offer some constructive (?) criticism.

First, Harlan Ellison's essay on the New Wave and Darrell Schweitzer's reply. Obviously, both are right. As Ellison points out, the New Wave was necessary to keep SF alive, fresh, and relevant. Yet, as Schweitzer indicates, the freedom to experiment with style and content didn't really last. Cyberpunk is not a replacement. Once you've read *Neuromancer*, you've read 'em all. What happened to variety? We're heavy book buyers — around 7 to 10 a month — but we haven't bought SF or fantasy in almost two years. We've just been burned too many times with books that were either clones of another book or some part of an interminable series.

Our question: so what did happen to the New Wave? Schweitzer says it didn't sell. We realize that's what publishers told authors. But was that really true? Elaine, who went to public high school in the mid-70s Deep South, remembers when it seemed like just about everybody read Philip K. Dick. Hell, it was exciting stuff like the *Orbit* volumes, *Dangerous Visions*, and a few Ballard hardcovers that kept her reading SF long after she abandoned fantasy. Yeah, we tended to pass around dog-eared copies so that 10 or 12 people could read the same book, but that's because we couldn't get our own copy at the bookstore. Could it be that publishers simply assumed that New

Classified Ads

Wave wouldn't sell, refused to stock the books, and then created a self-fulfilling prophecy? Does anybody really know? Maybe Ellison or Schweitzer or somebody could comment? I mean, if a bunch of partied-out high school kids aren't the public, who is? I don't think Nancy Reagan or Richard Nixon buys a lot of SF anyway.

Next: David Brin's two essays. We hardly know where to begin. Of course, it's simply not true that Western civilization came up with the idea that, "Everything I think I know ... has been colored by my biased senses ... Because of this, I must be skeptical ... I must be aware of the convincing power of the ego." This concept has been a basic tenet of esoteric Hinduism for three thousand years, if not longer; it's also found in Buddhism, Gnosticism, many forms of shamanism, and elsewhere. Sword-and-sorcery novels aside, it's also a cornerstone of most magical systems. In fact, magicians and scientists were historically the same people until about the time of the Renaissance. It's just plain unfair to give science all the credit for this one. As Newton pointed out, "If I have seen further than other men, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants." In any case, an educated person must be able to look forward and backward to truly understand the world.

It's also terribly unfair to criticize those who came before us for "hoarding" their knowledge. Brin can't honestly be unaware that millions of magicians (and people merely accused of being magicians) have been imprisoned, tortured, and murdered throughout history for daring to explore the mysteries of the universe. We're confident that if Brin had to work under such conditions, he, too, would be very careful about whom he shared his secrets. There would be none of those 13-part nature shows on PBS that Brin mentions if the scientists involved thought they would be burned at the stake for their troubles!

And the idea that scientists are "kindly," "unassuming" sorts totally lacking in ego — or even that the public thinks that any living scientist is "kindly" or "unassuming" — is so laughable that we are quite unable to steady ourselves long enough to type a comment.

We didn't mean to moan for quite this long, and (as Ellison pointed out) y'all have better things to do than respond to readers' gripes. So here's just one last request: Can't you twist the arms of Ellison, Brin, & Company long enough to get them to treat us to some of their delightful fiction? (We're working on it. — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Elaine Radford
Roger Williams
Kenner, LA

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You can't go home again.

Daniel caught the flicker of a hitchhiker in the headlights and passed right on by. He didn't trust hitchhikers, especially ones along old roads late at night. He'd be turning off pretty soon, anyway; he couldn't have done that man much good.

You can't go home again.

That thought kept flickering through his mind.

But then he didn't have a home to go to anymore.

He knew the turnoff was coming once he passed over the rickety old wooden bridge. No matter how overgrown the turnoff was, he would always know exactly how far it was from the end of that bridge. His tires would stop vibrating and his heart would beat so many beats, and there it would be. Between two heavy-hanging willows, no different from all the other willows along the road, except to him.

Slowing the car almost to a crawl, he directed the car between them. No guessing how bad the road was through here anymore.

Sure enough, his car rocked back and forth over the terrain. He'd have to see to smoothing out the road. He couldn't afford to let too much time pass without taking care of it.

He could just make out the peaked thatched roof in the moonlight, and then the sudden glimmer in the front window as he crossed the stone bridge, welcoming him, letting him know that all was well and that he was expected. The cottage was just the other side of this bridge, up a gravel drive. He parked the car beneath the overhanging roof on the far side and shut off the engine. The night was alive with crickets. He started to lock the car as he got out, but caught himself. No need for that out here. There was just one small bag in the trunk; it had taken him only a few minutes to throw this together. He took it out, closed the trunk, and walked around to the front of the cottage. The light in the front window was bright and beckoning to him by the time he got to the front door.

His key turned easily in the slot, and a warm fire greeted him in the small living room when he went in.

He'd moved twice since his last visit. It made the drive longer, and he was exhausted. He stopped briefly in the living room, to warm his hands and drink in the fine atmosphere, before venturing beyond. The finely bound edition of *Gone With the Wind* still sat on the sideboard, a cedar bookmark, like a picket, marking Tara's fence. He ran his hand over the porcelain lamp by the main hall door; it was shaped like a large

flame, and was covered with small holes that emitted pinpricks of light. Then he went into the hallway, heading down toward the spare bedroom that was his final destination.

The halls and walls were bathed in a faint blue light; just enough to see by, but not enough to hurt his eyes. He stopped for another brief moment at another doorway. He couldn't see anything inside the dark room. He waited.

After a few moments he could hear the slow, measured breathing.

And feel the lump in his throat.

He walked on, to make himself comfortable for the night.

Morning came quickly to the cottage.

The sky shifted and blued a little, conspiring with the sun to spring over the mountain, to quickly break dawn. Just like that.

The crickets thinned out quite a bit, but the rest of the community of insects came to life. And the small animals. And the fish in the clear mountain stream.

Daniel was awakened by a sudden light, and, more deliciously, the smell of bacon sizzling, wafting through the cottage. He got up, stretched, and went in for his shower. He hadn't shaved for over a week; this was to be a weekend of letting go. Afterwards he pulled on a comfortable sweater and a soft pair of pants and headed down the hall.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," Grandma said, when he came into the kitchen. She turned from her cooking counter, saw him, and exclaimed, "You're growing a beard!" Smallish, with her dirty-gray hair short and curly, she had the face of an apple doll, all curlicued with wrinkles and puffed pink cheeks.

He took a step forward and kissed her on that soft cheek. Her skin smelled like childhood.

"Well," she said, regaining her composure, "I hope you're hungry. Do you want to guess what I'm fixing?"

Eating had been the last thing on his mind these last few weeks, but somehow, in this cottage, in her presence, with that smell in his nostrils, he could never refuse.

He didn't have to guess the menu.

He smiled, a little snifle-headed, trying to hold back the water in the corner of his eyes. "How about hash brown potatoes, and eggs, over easy, and three pieces of sausage, and two strips of bacon?"

"And a glass of apple cider. Mustn't forget your



MAK

fruit juices."

He gave her a hug.

"No time for that," she said. "Get along with you. You don't want me to burn this, do you? Go say good morning to your Grandfather and tell him breakfast's almost ready."

Daniel looked around.

"Where is he?"

"I'd say he's outside looking at the stream. If I know him he'll want to get in some fishing while you're here."

Grandpa was standing along the river's bank by the side of the cottage, as if surveying how time had changed the lay of the land. Things had gotten overgrown; could he have gotten upset with Daniel for not keeping the place up?

He was still a couple of inches taller than Daniel; any hope he may have had of outgrowing the old man had left him by his last visit. He had the same kind of comfortably well-worn face as the woman in the kitchen, just a more prominent nose and wider smile. He was dressed the way Daniel always thought of him, but that was scarcely surprising. His large head had a captain's hat snugly screwed down on it, and his feet were covered with a pair of light-colored moccasins. In between were the loose-fitting shirt and trousers that did little to disguise his lanky frame. Casual, perhaps, but immaculate: a retired gentleman. Daniel could even see the pack of Camel cigarettes in his shirt pocket.

Grandpa. Or Bericho, his nickname, which was how "Grandpa" came out of Daniel when he was learning how to talk. Amazing that this registered on his parents' minds, recalling it so many years later at a unique christening.

When he saw Daniel his smile was cautious; Daniel knew he didn't look very encouraging.

He went up to the old man and wound his arms around him. Grandpa had a powerful hug for someone so lean. Then he let Daniel go.

"Again?"

"Again," Daniel said quietly, exhaling. "Still."

Grandpa walked along the path, stirring up grasshoppers in the underbrush. "We'll always be here for you, Danny, but I hope you know it doesn't always have to be under this kind of circumstances."

"I know. I feel bad about that." He couldn't control the tightness in his voice. "I was expecting this visit to be one of the big ones — my next visit, I mean. Bringing her to meet you and explain things. I was hoping..."

He looked Daniel in the eyes. "Children of your own."

"Yes. Things were going good and I was putting all my energy into keeping them that way. I wanted to bring her here, but then things started going wrong, and that really took up all my time, trying to salvage things..."

"One person can't make it work all by himself."

"I know that. I was just trying to hold things together until she came to her senses. Which I guess she did."

"But not the way you wanted."

This wasn't going to be easy. There was so much he had to get off his chest, but he was still so knotted up inside that it was hard to let go. The old man put his arm around Daniel's shoulder.

"How long you gonna be here this time?"

"I've got to leave tomorrow night."

They walked toward the back door. Grandpa was signing him up.

"You growing a beard?"

Breakfast was delicious, and Daniel dutifully packed away as much of it as he could. Grandma kept busy fussing over him and complaining about how thin he'd let himself get and making sure that he had everything he wanted to eat. Daniel kept catching Grandpa looking him over. Had the old man realized what a long-term job it was going to be offering guidance and support to Daniel after his parents were gone? They had come into his life at the end of his parents' lives, when his mother had already succumbed to the poisons destroying the both of them, and his father was trying to finish the unique legacy that would see their child through after they had gone on. Lives created out of sadness. And so far he had done nothing to dispel this.

Perhaps if the sensitive boy hadn't grown into the sensitive man.

Grandma was pressing one last piece of marmalade toast on him.

"How is the job?" Grandpa asked.

"So-so," Daniel replied, his mouth full of marmalade.

"Same firm?"

"Yes, but I don't think the place is going to survive through to Valentine's Day. I'm looking around for something else."

Grandpa wiped the remains of breakfast from his mouth with a napkin. "Just don't quit the one until you've found something else."

"Don't worry," Daniel said, forcing a smile. "I've got too many bills to pay."

After helping with the dishes, he followed Grandpa around to the back of the cottage, to the gardening shed. The weeds and plants needed a lot of work, and Daniel made a mental vow that whatever he couldn't do for them this weekend, that he would definitely arrange to do some restoration on the property in the future. The potholes in the road weren't the only things that needed going over.

It was only inside the cottage that time stood still.

The two of them pulled weeds and hoed the "garden." Daniel collected over three rattan baskets full of dead autumn leaves, which prompted Grandpa to reminisce about when he could have burned those leaves in the back yard incinerator. They both found it odd that a world slowly killing itself with toxic waste could jump on such strict laws about burning leaves.

And so the day was spent. Grandpa replaced the plants in the front window box, which had overgrown until the fronds touched the ground, and the one in the basket hanging over the front door, which had died. A

couple of tins of paint were produced and the outside of the cottage was touched up here and there. Mostly it was the dark wooden slats used as trimming that needed a dab or two. The rest of the place was built too well, built to last, for it to ever be in too much need of repair. Its simple, rustic facade did much to disguise the mechanical wonders it contained.

The exertion felt good to Daniel. He worked up a sweat inside his top, and shed it for awhile, until the crisp air cooled his skin. It never quite managed to take his mind off his troubles, but it was nice to dull his feelings with the physical strain.

Night came as swiftly as had the dawn.

And Daniel was pleased to feel exhausted by the time it did.

"Tomorrow," Grandpa promised, "we fish."

Dinner was the thickest of stews, with some of the most improbable ingredients in it. Daniel amazed himself by eating an entire heaping bowl of the stuff by the living room fire, washed down by a whole jug of that wonderful apple cider. A glimmer of wonder passed his mind at how the food was managed; more of his parents' foresightedness, no doubt, but it puzzled him just the same. He wished he'd known his parents longer. "Madame Doctor and the Surly Professor," to hear Grandpa speak of them, or "the Inventors," he would say, always with great affection, putting that old-fashioned phrase to their combined knowledge of physics and metallurgy and the quantum mechanics of physical motion and a host of other subjects that they combined into what would end up being their life's work. Never as "daughter and son." And by not alluding to the true facts of the situation, they better maintained what was no longer just an illusion to Daniel. He wished he had inherited more of his parents' courage; he never ceased to be amazed at how much they had managed to create while facing a death sentence handed down by nature angered by the ignorance of man.

After breakfast came the fishing. Which amounted to a lot of sitting under one of the medium-sized willows and holding a pole. Grandpa finally started asking specifics.

"What was her name?"

"Jocelyn. Van der Veer."

"What did she look like?"

"Short. Slight. Very pretty. Very classy looking. Kind of austere."

"How long had you been with her?"

"Two years." Two years with no progress, nothing to show for all that work, all those hopes. "You know, every year, around my annual birthday depression, I look back at the year and try to figure out what's better than it was last year at the same time." Daniel's birthday was between Christmas and New Year. "I usually don't find much of anything."

Grandpa flicked his line. "That's why you get depressed."

"I know. I know. I keep telling myself that next year's going to be different. It's going to be Daniel's year. Then when the decade changed, I figured that would end my streak of bad luck. It was going to be Daniel's decade. Maybe I have to wait for Daniel's century."

"Life doesn't work that way."

"Somehow I knew you were going to say that."

"What went wrong between Jocelyn and you?"

"Different cycles, I guess. I was falling in love with her while she was falling out of love with me, to hear her describe it. She tried to tell me she loved me until she got to know me. I just wish I'd realized she didn't know me a little earlier. Two years is a long time to be dreaming about spending your life with someone special."

"Cycles sometimes come full circle."

"Not this time — at least, I don't think so. She's changed too much." He glanced up at Grandpa. "It wasn't just her looks that were austere. She used to be such a warm, loving person. A good person. At least to me. I can't help wondering what happened to that side of her."

"Some women deal with splitting up that way."

Grandpa flicked his line again. Maybe he was trying to stir up the fish, maybe he didn't want to be bothered with them and was scaring them away. Daniel didn't know.

"You've got a big heart, Danny. Bigger than most people's. You feel things stronger, you care more, that means you're gonna hurt more, too. I'd like to tell you you're going to find someone out there that feels as deeply as you do, but it's not likely to happen. You just have to go on. I know how hard it is for you to put those things behind you. Feels impossible, sometimes. It's like you've got to age away from them, 'cause you can't put them in your back pocket and forget about 'em like most people. But that doesn't mean it's all bad. You're going to hurt more than most people, Danny, but you're also more alive than most people."

"Now you take this little girl that gave you up. Do you think she's ever going to be able to love someone the way you do? If she can't love you then she can't be a whole woman to you. And if she can't love anyone, then she can't be a whole woman to herself. She's missing out on the most miraculous thing in creation."

"After all you've been through, how do you feel about her?"

"I still love her, if that's what you mean."

"And what do you think of her?"

"That she thinks not feeling is a strength."

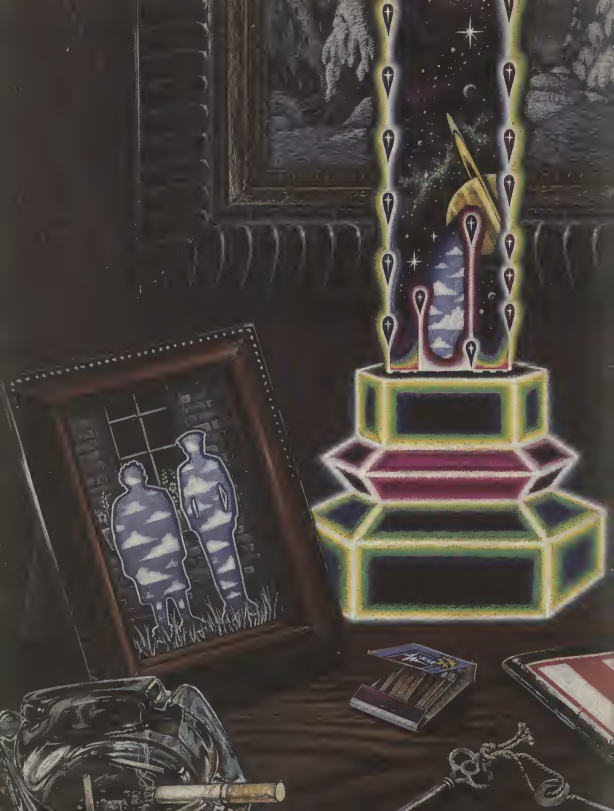
"And how do you feel about yourself — loving her, I mean."

"That I'm a chump."

"That all sounds pretty normal to me." He glanced Daniel's way. "But would you take her back if she asked?"

Daniel had set the pole aside and was looking off into the distance, absently pulling at the blades of grass.

"I won't make a life with someone who doesn't love me. No matter what I feel about her."



The rest of the day he spent helping Grandma with her baking. If anyone could salvage a slack appetite, she could. Once you smelled the things she prepared, it became a mortal sin to let them go to waste. Today she baked a light chocolate cake, and then covered it in her "7-minute" icing; it stayed in the icebox while she mixed up some kind of dough.

"Probably the last thing in the world you want to hear is that there are plenty of other fish in the sea," she said, going into the icebox to test the cake.

Daniel smiled. "You're right. That is the last thing in the world I want to hear."

She cut him a slice of cake; the outside of the icing had set up, cracking slightly as she cut through it.

"I suppose that telling you it's not the end of the world wouldn't help, either?" She looked at him; his expression must have confirmed her suspicion. "I don't believe that anyhow. A person's life is a whole bunch of different worlds, all overlapping. What you've got to remember is that just because one world is ending, doesn't mean that the next one won't be better."

"I suppose so. It's just so hard to give up someone that's meant so much to you — that you've tried so hard to hold onto."

"Well, Danny, I know you must have done your best. You can't blame yourself. It just wasn't meant to be, that's all. I know how hard it is for you to be alone. You've just got to be more cautious in the future, that's all." She hugged him. "You deserve the best, you know?"

"Thanks, Grandma."

She wagged a finger in front of his face.

"You can't expect perfection, though. You probably won't be made for each other — at least not like your grandfather and me."

They sat around the hearth that night, talking. Grandma alternated between her embroidery and reading Margaret Mitchell. Embroidery was the closest she came to sewing, recreational or otherwise. Right now she had half-finished the image of a white cat peeking through some multicolored flowers with green leaves.

Grandpa confirmed that Daniel had to leave that night.

"Have to," Daniel answered. "Got a long drive in front of me."

"Work in the morning?"

"Yeah. And I've got to start working up a resume and start looking for a new place to live."

"Where are all your things?" Grandma asked.

"In storage."

"Heavens! What about your books? They'll get silverfish in them."

Daniel smiled. "Well then, I guess I'll just have to get them fumigated before I move to another place."

He kissed Grandma on the forehead. She had changed into a thick night-dress and was admonishing him.

"And don't wait so long the next time. You don't have to have a world ending to come visit us."

"No, I promise."

He'd made up his mind. Born of pain, visited in times of hardship, it was about time he created some "up" time in his life to share with them.

She reached up and patted him on the side of his face.

"I don't know if I like this," she said of his newfound hirsuteness.

"It'll keep me warm for the rest of the winter."

"Well, don't forget us. And drive safely."

"Don't worry. I won't — and I will."

She trundled down the hallway to bed, giving him one last look before leaving the blue-light.

Grandpa pumped his arm.

"Just remember, life's a lot of picking yourself up and dusting yourself off. I can't tell you not to be troubled, or not to let it get you down. I know better than that. But you seem to be recuperating faster, the more mature you get."

"The older I get, you mean."

"No, I mean the more mature you get. You don't think you're any better off than your last visit, and there you're wrong. You're older and wiser, and I dare say you know a lot better what you're looking for in this world. Just don't let your sights down. If it's any consolation, it would have taken someone very warm and understanding to accept us."

Daniel felt a pang of guilt. "That's one of the reasons it's been so long. I don't know how many times I tried to tell her about the two of you."

"Then it's just as well that you didn't. It might have created a lot of trouble for you. We're not for the whole world, Danny. Just you and your family, when you have one."

He'd never really thought about it that way before. They were a great gift, these two, but with them came a certain responsibility. It was more than fixing a pothole here, replacing a dead plant there. It was up to him to protect them, as well.

"When the right woman comes along, you'll be able to tell her, though I doubt if it'll be very easy even then. Your grandmother and I are looking forward to your children, now. It's about time we were there for them, as well."

Daniel wasn't looking him in the eye. "I know."

The old man smiled, that infinitely benign, persuasive smile. "Well, take care of yourself. And don't be afraid to come around when there's some good news. I have a hunch that'll be real soon."

Grandpa — Bericho — gave him a tight hug, and went off down the hall, towards his long sleep.

Daniel waited for the sounds of the two bodies settling to stop.

Then he wiped his eyes and walked gently down the hall, to stand by their door.

This time he waited for the breathing to cease.

He closed and locked the front door on his way out.

The light through the front window dimmed and slowly went out. □

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